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LECTURES ON PRAYER

AND

KINDRED SUBJECTS.

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AND

KINDRED SUBJECTS.

BY

JOSEPH S. SEWELL.

LONDON:

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P R E F A C E .

THE following Lectures have been delivered in the Friends' Meeting Houses of some of our large towns ; the first four have thus become known to many " Friends," and I have been on several occasions asked to publish them. Hitherto, one reason for refusing to do this, has been the hope that I might be able to read them myself in other places, to which I have been invited for that purpose. Now, as I am expecting in a few weeks to leave this country, on a mission of Christian love to the island of Madagascar, this reason for keeping them back has ceased to operate, and other objections which I have felt to bringing them and myself thus prominently forward, have been overcome by the desire to leave in the hands of my friends some memento of past seasons of pleasant and refreshing intercourse, and some record of the deep religious convictions and earnest desires, which are feebly set forth in the following pages.

Owing to a great pressure of engagements, I have been quite unable to give as much time and thought as I should have liked, to the preparation of these Lectures for the press. Their division into chapters was suggested to me by one on whose judgment in

such matters I could well rely; I trust, on the whole, it will prove to have been of advantage.

When treating subjects on which much party-feeling has in times past been evolved, I have greatly desired to avoid anything like sectarianism; if I have failed in doing this to the full, it has been unconsciously. I believe, however, that the mutual love and harmony of our different religious communities is not increased by our being always silent on the points on which we differ. I grant, we had much better be silent than, when we speak, meet as enemies expecting blows and ever on the watch to ward them off or retaliate: but if, instead of doing thus, we came together more frequently in brotherly confidence, confessing *our own* perplexities and failings, as well as our mistrust of the wisdom or correctness of the actions of *others*, our love to each other would be increased, and we should prove mutually helpful. It has long been one of my most earnest desires, that the parting prayer of our gracious Lord, for unity among His disciples, might be fulfilled far more largely than, since the first ages of the Church, it has ever yet been, "*That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they may be one in us; that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.*"

Hitchin, Second Month 4, 1867.

LECTURE I.

PRAYER.

INTRODUCTION.

PRAYER is the intercourse which takes place between our souls and the great Searcher of hearts. It does not consist in the mere uttering of words, or in any outward form; it is an act of the soul. We cannot pray aright unless we are taught of God. "Lord, teach us to pray," was the petition of the apostles, and we need continually to make the same request. Is it not then presumptuous in man to attempt such teaching? We should pause before doing so, for the question may well be asked. Yet He who said to Peter, "Feed my lambs," "Feed my sheep," still calls on one and another to do the same; and he who has received any such call cannot be silent on the subject of prayer.

It is a subject connected with so many questions affecting both the life of religion in the soul and the

outward practice of it, that it would be vain in one or two lectures to treat it with all the breadth and fulness it admits of. No such attempt has been made by me in these papers. I have confined my attention almost exclusively to those allusions to prayer which we find in the teaching of our Saviour, and my desire has been to bring before those who profess His name the leading features of this teaching, and to press upon their attention a few points which have been too much lost sight of in the present day.

As regards many who hear them, my words will only "put them in remembrance of these things, though they know them, and have been established in the truth of them:" but if, "by way of remembrance," they should help to "stir up the pure minds" of any; if they should arouse any to greater diligence in availing themselves of the blessed privilege of prayer; if they should give to any a deeper sense of its value, or a firmer confidence in its applicability to all the wants and conditions of fallen man; or if they should raise in the hearts of any a louder song of thanksgiving and praise to Him who has granted such a privilege to His people, they will not have been written in vain.

What a remarkable proof of God's love do we find in the fact that He has always permitted us

freely to hold intercourse with Himself. Our sins have separated between Him and us; our iniquities have hid His face from us that He would not hear; *we* have thus shut the door upon His mercies, but His ear has always been open to the cry of the humble and the contrite in all ages and in all countries. The Old Testament abounds with instances of prayer; we trace it as a mark of spiritual life from Enoch to Nehemiah; we meet with it under every variety of circumstances; we see the poor and needy listened to, whilst the proud and disobedient cry in vain for help, but we never read of any one being forbidden to pray. Prayer always available, till death shuts the door, as regards the impenitent sinner; this is the lesson which the Bible teaches.

Thus, when our Saviour dwelt among men, He did not speak of prayer as if it were some new thing that needed to be explained to His disciples, but as something with which they were quite familiar; though there was much respecting it which they required to be taught. There were wrong ideas prevalent on which He wished to set them right; there were some special requests which He urged them to make; and He encouraged them diligently to avail themselves of this means of grace by His own example and by many gracious promises. This

evening we will devote our attention chiefly to His words of caution, and to what He has taught us as to the blessings we may pray for, leaving His example and His promises to a future occasion.

CHAPTER I.

CAUTIONS.

“And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are : for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret, and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.”—*MATT. vi. 5, 6.*

“It is no use your praying to attract the attention of man.” This seems to be our Saviour’s first lesson. It should humble us to think that it was necessary for Him to teach it; for it does require teaching still. The conduct of the Pharisees is repulsive to us: no one would think of literally following their example; but are no other contrivances sometimes made use of with the same end in view? We do well to be watchful, and honestly to examine ourselves lest any temptation in this direction should overcome us, lest the desire that others should know something of our private communion with God, and think highly of us in con-

sequence, should lead us into snares which would not only sadly mar our enjoyment in such communion, but rob us of many blessings. "Enter into thy closet, and *shut the door.*" This is ever the safest course. Thus should we keep our prayers, except perhaps under some few peculiar circumstances, a solemn secret between our Father in heaven and ourselves.

And yet there is danger in the opposite direction. There may be such a fear of letting others know that we are accustomed to pray, as shall really cause us to restrain prayer before God, and prevent us from availing ourselves of those opportunities which our circumstances allow us. Suppose, for instance, two or three young people, members of the same family, sleeping in the same bedroom; and that one of these knows the value of prayer, for he has realized that he is a child of God: do these words of our Saviour forbid him to kneel down by his bedside, as he would have done had he had the room to himself? Indeed they do not; he has a testimony to bear, and his simplicity and humility in bearing it will not be without its fruit. He is not praying *in order* that he may be seen of men; he is unable literally to obey our Saviour's command; let him be careful to observe the spirit of it, and he will not lose his reward.

Though these words evidently refer to our private

intercourse with God, they will also to some extent apply to prayers offered in the family or in more public gatherings. In any case is it possible that He who searcheth the heart will attend to the prayer of him whose chief object it is to be heard of men? A popular and very eloquent minister was accustomed in his college days to take his turn with his fellow-students in conducting the morning worship. The service was generally poorly attended; but when it was known to be his turn to offer prayer, though in his after life he admitted that he was then a stranger to God, such was the beauty and flow of his language, that the room was crowded with hearers. We must not call such effusions prayer. However they may please the ear of man, or even impress his mind with beautiful and glorious thoughts, they have no power with God. A few broken utterances from an illiterate man, who is in earnest to reach the ear of his Father in heaven, will be infinitely more likely to rise up as sweet incense before the throne of grace. But there is something so repugnant to our best feelings, something so awful in the thought of sinful man addressing the holy Lord God in words contrived to attract the praise of his fellow-men, that it does not require here to be further dwelt upon.

There is another temptation, perhaps more frequently successful with those who are expected regu-

early to offer prayer in the presence of others, viz., to engage in this solemn exercise when their hearts are not prepared for it; to ask for blessings, not because they are feeling the need of them, but because they suppose they *ought* to feel the need of them; to continue uttering a string of requests with no expectation that they will be granted, but lest those who hear them should think them failing in their duty if they did not make them. Custom, and indeed a conscientious attachment to the custom, renders them often blind to the fact that their prayers are the mere utterances of words, not the outpourings of a soul bowed at the Saviour's feet. But the result of such prayers is not merely to be told in their failing to bring a blessing: often much positive evil is the consequence. An undue familiarity with sacred names and sacred things, a want of truthfulness in the expression of our feelings, a low estimate of the real character of prayer, and hypocrisy in many forms, are all undoubtedly encouraged by it. If God's holy name be frequently taken in vain in heartless public prayer, though it may not be offered to win the praise of men, but rather to preserve a form or maintain a certain position before our fellow-Christians, we must not be surprised if that name be thereby brought into contempt in the eyes of our children or others.

But some may ask, "Is not the absence of all vocal prayer on such occasions equally injurious?" I believe it is. That the father of a family should assemble with his household day by day to read the Bible with them, but from week to week, and even from year to year, never have anything further to offer ; never feel called upon in their presence to seek for God's blessing, and by the solemn act of prayer to commit himself with them to the care and guidance of his Father in heaven, does imply something sadly wrong, and such ought not to be surprised if the consequences are as much to be deplored as where lifeless prayer is frequently offered. Some may think that it is a safe side on which to err,—that if there is no good there is yet no harm done ; but in truth there is no safe side for error.

How, then, are we to steer clear of the evils on both sides ? Where is the remedy ? No doubt, in the first place, it is to be found in our own closer walk with God, in our setting Him always before us, and in a more continuous and earnest endeavour, in the strength which He shall give us, faithfully to fulfil all those duties which our several relations impose upon us. If, realizing that we are redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, we sought more to live in the Spirit, and walk in the Spirit, and bring forth the fruits of the Spirit, things would not be as they

too often are. And if this is not done, no outward arrangements of any kind can possibly set things right. Yet arrangements and practices not founded on sound principles may prove hurtful to us, even when endeavouring in all simplicity to follow and obey our Saviour. And I fear that is a hurtful custom which compels any one regularly, at stated periods, to utter words of prayer in his family or elsewhere, whatever the state of his mind. If the time so spent was often employed in silent waiting upon God, some evils at least would be avoided; and when, in the fulness of his heart, such an one did give utterance to his feelings, it would be with all the more freshness and power. I do not wish, however, to speak dogmatically; I feel that I, and indeed that we all, have much to learn on this subject, and that many of us, whilst seeking to avoid an evil in one direction, have been led into another equally disastrous. What I desire is that we may all of us see that there are evils, very serious evils, in both directions, and carefully seek to avoid them. May nothing that we do or say tend to check the right exercise of public prayer in any place or on any occasion; but oh, may we be preserved from that which is lifeless and consists only in words!

But our Saviour warns us also against vain repetitions :—

“When ye pray use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do ; for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye, therefore, like unto them ; for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of before ye ask Him.”—MATT. vi. 7, 8.

What was common in our Saviour's day is common still ; and whilst we exclaim at the absurdity of the poor ignorant heathen, who, having written his prayer, fixes it to a wheel turned by the wind, believing that each revolution of the wheel will repeat his prayer to his god ; and whilst we pity the superstition of the Catholic, counting by his beads how often he has repeated his Paternoster, let us be careful that we do nothing like these things ourselves. Sometimes we may have been occupied in repeating a form of words without thinking what we were saying, or what requests we have been making, and then have risen from our knees, satisfied with ourselves as having “said our prayers.” How does that very expression, “said our prayers,” evidence to what an extent this caution of our Saviour is still needed !

But we must not, whilst taking heed to this lesson, forget that taught in the parable of the unjust judge, and again in that of the man who went at midnight to his friend to borrow three loaves of bread. In these we are plainly enjoined always to pray, and not to faint ; to continue pleading for the same thing till

we receive it. How beautifully, too, does the narrative of the Syro-Phenician woman teach us the same lesson !

Nor is it inconsistent with the previous one. Our Father knows before we ask Him what things we have need of, and also whether we are in earnest or not with regard to the requests we make ; but often we do not know this ourselves. If the answer does not at once come, and we cease to ask, we learn with how little sincerity we have been praying. Again, it might not be well for us at once to receive what we ask for ; then, the invitation to repeat the request may prevent the delay from unduly discouraging us. And, moreover, it is quite in accordance with much of our Lord's dealings with his people, sometimes to try their faith by appearing for a while as if He were about to "pass by them." Such trial in the end, if faith does not fail, is invariably accompanied by a rich blessing, which much more than makes up for the pain incurred by the suspense. If the request of the Syro-Phenician woman had been granted when first she made it, she would have gone away, no doubt, happy and thankful ; but a deeper and a fuller joy was her portion, when, after patiently waiting and still humbly pleading, she heard those gracious words, "O woman, great is thy faith ; be it unto thee even as thou wilt."

Let us, then, seek to learn both these lessons ; not fainting in prayer because the answer does not come, nor constantly uttering the words of request in needless repetitions, as if this would bring the blessing ; but, having committed our cause unto the Lord, waiting upon Him from hour to hour and from day to day, with that pleading expectation which says with all humility and reverence, even unto the Lord Almighty, " I will not let Thee go except Thou bless me."

There is yet another caution given by our Saviour, somewhat similar to the first I have alluded to ; that was against praying, in order that *others* might think us righteous ; but in the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican we are warned against coming to God in prayer, thinking *ourselves* righteous, and expecting because of our righteousness to find favour with Him.

The Pharisee honestly thought himself far better than the Publican ; he thanks God for it, and then goes on to tell Him what good things he does, and what wicked things he leaves undone, and so his prayer ends ; he has no sense of want, he believes himself all right, and he goes away, apparently satisfied with himself for having performed another good deed. How solemn is the thought that man can thus deceive himself, can think himself so nearly right that there is nothing to be afraid of, when in fact he is all

wrong. The righteousness of the Pharisee consisted altogether of what was apparent to his fellow-men. How his heart was in God's sight he did not care to examine. He contrasted his outward actions with those of the mass around him, and thanked God that he was better than they. But this will not do. Well might our Saviour say of such as these, "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven." Job thought himself righteous and that his afflictions were undeserved. But when God spoke to him, when he saw himself in His holy presence, then he had nothing to say about his own righteousness. "I have heard of Thee," said he, "with the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth Thee; wherefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes." And it is thus that we should come before God in prayer, not comparing ourselves with others, but with Him to whom we are about to speak; our coldness and ingratitude with His unutterable love, our pollution with His perfect holiness, our littleness with His glorious majesty; and if of these things we have any just conception, the most advanced amongst us will have to say with Job, "Wherefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes." The Publican felt all this; he could only say, "God be merciful to me a sinner," and he went down to his house justified.

We know better than to pray just as the Pharisee did ; we are not likely to *tell* God how good we are ; still many prayers are not attended to for the same reason. Self-righteousness, in some form or other, may be as common now as it was then. There is such a thing as a man being proud of his humility, and it may be that some of us, after a full confession of our sins, and after calling ourselves all manner of hard names, expect God to think better of us in consequence. Or it may be after some act of self-denial, and, as we think, of devotedness to our Saviour, we pray with more expectation of being heard because of our obedience. All this is but imitating the Pharisee ; it is not right in the sight of Him who searcheth our hearts. When shall we thoroughly learn the lesson that our only hope of answer is in the mercy of our God in Christ Jesus ; that we have no name or righteousness to plead but that of Him who loved us and gave Himself for us, and that His name is all-availing ? He has said, "Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father *in my name*, He will give it you." Here we see how the most polluted sinner, seeking to turn from his wickedness, may draw near to the Holy Lord God, may speak with Him, may plead with Him, may venture to ask again and again, and, instead of being spurned from His presence, be accepted and blessed. His prayers come up before the mercy-seat in the

name of Jesus. It is as if *He* presented them to the Father, as if *He* obtained the answer for us ; it is *His* righteousness which is seen, not our filthy rags. Thus looking at the cross, and relying on the pardoning love there made manifest, we may come *boldly* unto the throne of grace, to obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

CHAPTER II.

REQUESTS.

AND now, leaving what we are to avoid, let us turn to lessons of a more positive nature. But first let me draw attention to the fact that, throughout our Lord's teachings on this subject, He never speaks of prayer as if it consisted in a certain exalted frame of mind, but always as an *act* of the soul. Thus, when His disciples asked Him to teach them to pray, He replied by no lengthy remarks on the nature of prayer, but by giving them a simple form of words, very short yet very full; conveying thereby to His disciples in all ages very much as to the character of those petitions which 'it is well for them to make, and which He is pleased to listen to.

"Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: for thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory for ever. Amen."

The first thought that occurs to us in connection with this prayer is the warrant it gives us to speak to God as to "Our Father." Oh! how much do those two words convey as to the spirit in which we should draw near to Him. We are not to sue for mercy as captives before a conqueror, or as vanquished rebels before a haughty and offended monarch; we are not to come as beggars to the gate of a rich man, whom we know to be liberal in dispensing his bounties, but at the same time proud and distant; we are not to come even as servants to a master who, though kind and considerate, is yet no relation of ours, and is wanting in all that tenderness of love and sympathy which close relationship gives; but we are to come as children to a father; a Father at once abundant in mercy, bounteous in giving from His exhaustless store of riches, and full of the tenderest sympathy and love towards each of His little ones. Yes, we who have gone astray like lost sheep, each one having chosen his own way, and having hoped, in following the imaginations of his own heart, to find more liberty and more enjoyment than when kept within the wise restraints of our Father's house, if we have not already returned are still invited to do so, are still assured that we *may* return to the arms of a loving Father, who will pass by all our wanderings, and

permit us to look up to Him with all the love and all the confidence of little children: who not only *permits* us thus to regard Him, but who *expects* it from us. And our coming in this spirit before Him, however often we may have tasted His love and proved His faithfulness, should in no wise encourage any lightness of disposition, any undue familiarity with His high and holy name, or anything indeed which is not entirely consistent with those next words of the petition, "Hallowed be Thy name."

And then let us notice that the petition which comes next in order is not one for ourselves especially, not for our own temporal or even spiritual wants, but for the glory of God and for the advancement of His kingdom. Thus plainly showing that, as we are all the children of the same Father and members of the same family, our Lord intended that each one of us should feel a real interest in the progress of His cause on the earth, an interest so great that it should be uppermost in our prayers; an interest not in the well-doing of one sect alone, not in the spread of a few cherished opinions only, but an interest in the whole kingdom and family of Christ upon the earth.

But, though these should be our first desires, we are permitted also to ask for the supply of our daily wants. Our conversation with our heavenly Father

need not be confined to spiritual things, we are instructed to speak of our temporal wants also. Not indeed to pray for a provision that will last for years, but for such supplies as will last for the present day. No doubt the words, "Give us this day our daily bread," may be understood to apply to our spiritual food as well as to that needed for the body, but what I wish at present to dwell upon is the kindness of our God in allowing us to speak to Him about all our outward needs. If the promise is made to "*whatsoever* ye shall ask the Father in my name," it is plain that we may ask His counsel with regard to all that interests us; and I believe they are the happiest and walk the most securely who so completely make God their counsellor and friend, that there is nothing in their family concerns, in their daily occupation, in their intercourse with the world, respecting which, when in doubt or perplexity, they do not consult their Father in heaven.

There are some who doubt or deny the interference of the Almighty in the concerns of His people, who imagine that such providential care is below His exalted Majesty, and who regard Him rather as keeping at a distance, leaving those laws of nature which He has ordained, in their unalterable course to work out all His glorious ends. To such as these the inspeaking voice of the Holy Spirit

and the ministry of angels, as well as the miracles recorded in Scripture, must be unintelligible, and all prayer can be nothing but a form. But it is not thus that He has revealed Himself to us. Whilst we have the assurance that "not even a sparrow shall fall to the ground without your heavenly Father," that "the very hairs of your head are all numbered," that "all things work together for good to them that love God," that "He careth for us," we may well lay aside all the fears that such cold theology would impart, and rest in the confidence that as there is nothing too great for Him, so there is nothing so little but it finds a place in His regard. *We* may often sadly overrate the importance of some things, as we also sadly underrate the importance of others; but everything has its place, its right place in His all-seeing eye, and as such it will claim His special attention and, if need be, His interference also, when in simple child-like trust we commit our way to Him or ask for His counsel.

Nor is it only in the answers we receive in reference to outward matters that we derive benefit in making them subjects of prayer. By that very act we give them an importance in our own eyes which they have not hitherto had, and our common daily duties become what they strictly are, more or less religious duties. We become much more able to

see that the injunction of the apostle, which has seemed so very high, is yet in measure at least possible to us; "Whether therefore ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, *do all to the glory of God.*" Let me take two or three cases for illustration.

How much of our thought and energy is directed, often very properly directed, to the getting of money. Many years ago I knew a young man who commenced business with the avowed intention of devoting the whole energy of his mind to the acquisition of wealth; this was to be, till he had accomplished his object, the *one* aim before him. He had his reward; he obtained what he considered a sufficiency and retired from business. I know not but that he still lives, but when last I saw him, a blight seemed to have rested both on himself and on his family; and I know few, who make any pretensions to respectability and the outward profession of Christianity, who more excite my pity than he used to do when it was my lot to be in his company. Few even whose profession of Christianity is hypocritical would make such a barefaced avowal as this; yet in fact how largely does this same spirit prevail. And it is very easy to see that those in whom it does prevail will not be very nice as to the means taken to gain their end. Any course that man's law or man's custom allows is right in their eyes; yes, and often

much that it does not allow ; but God's more perfect law is not consulted. It is no use exhorting such to pray about their business ; they have virtually set God on one side ; they have no confidence in Him as the source of blessing and joy. Mammon is their god, and death is the wages of his service.

But where a higher and a holier aim far out-tops this, where any one has learned in the school of Christ what has been done for him, and loves because of the love that has been shewn to him, such an one will desire to please his Saviour in his worldly business as well as in all things else. But, oh, the snares which the devil has laid here ! How thickly are they strewn in the path of those who seem necessarily called to have much to do with the world. How hard it seems sometimes to distinguish the right from the wrong, how difficult to keep the eye single, and to keep God's holy law above the maxims and precepts of worldly policy. If this difficulty exists, so much the more reason is there for watching unto prayer,—for patient, earnest, persevering prayer. And where this is the case, not only will strength be received from day to day in answer thereto, but the constant practice of bringing the perplexities and the cares of business in all sincerity before God, will be the means of shielding from much that is evil. The sincere acknowledging of God in these things wonderfully

helps us to keep the eye single ; yes, and open too to the temptations that surround us. And the getting of money being thus made, not the end sought, but only one means out of many towards an infinitely higher end, any mode of obtaining it which interferes with that higher end, however successful it may promise to be, will become sinful in our eyes, and will have no charms for us.

Then as to the *spending* of our money. How often is this a subject of anxious thought to rich as well as poor. Well, let any one in his anxieties in this respect in all honesty and sincerity consult his heavenly Father, and I am persuaded that there will not be much of the money thus brought before Him in prayer wasted in silly vanities to adorn the person. Certainly it will not be gambled with nor squandered at the public house ; nor do I think much would be spent in snuff, tobacco, or cigars. That required for the furniture of the house, for the comforts or luxuries of life, for daily food, for equipage and grounds, and for numberless other things, if brought, not in a spirit of bondage, but in loving child-like confidence to a kind and wise Father, would, I am persuaded, be often very differently spent from what it is at present ; and much more would be at liberty for the wants of the poor or the advancement of the kingdom of Christ.

I might take another question, how best to spend the time we have at our disposal. If we more felt the importance of this question, it would receive much more thought, and lead to much more prayer than it does. And if it were so, it would be almost certain to lead to no trifling change in the occupations and amusements of some of us. Time, however, will not allow me to say more on this subject; but, oh! it does not do in *any thing* to set our heavenly Father on one side, and act irrespective of Him. We ought not in any of our steppings to trust to our own judgment and reason without seeking for His wisdom to influence that judgment, and much less ought we to follow our own inclinations without considering whether or no they are in accordance with His will.

Again I repeat it; it is a blessed thing to make God our counsellor in everything, to consider no perplexity of too little consequence to be a subject of prayer to Him. Those who are most in the habit of praying thus, best know the fulfilment of that gracious promise, "In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths."

The next petition in our Lord's Prayer is, "Forgive us our trespasses." Every one who knows the value of prayer feels that he has need to come daily to the fountain opened for sin and uncleanness, that he may know this prayer to be answered. Do not let us

forget, however, the conditions connected with it. One of these we mention as we utter the prayer. We must not expect to be forgiven ourselves if we are indulging an unforgiving disposition towards others. Again, it is of no use asking God to forgive us our sins if we are making no effort to avoid them. I may be mistaken ; but I much fear that, though we readily assent to the truth of these remarks, we sadly too little feel the force of them. If we have committed some very flagrant sin, something that brings upon us disgrace in the eyes of our fellow-creatures, we know at once it *must* be forsaken ; but are we not too much in the habit of considering the “little sins,” as we call them, the follies and shortcomings of each day, in a somewhat different light? We content ourselves in the evening, it may be, with summing them up promiscuously, trusting that the prayer, “forgive us our sins,” will include them all ; but we do so with but little sorrow for them, little effort to avoid them for the future, with nothing like what the apostle styles “resisting unto blood, striving against sin.” Hence much distant walking with God ; hence how often the absence of that peace and joy and rest of soul which should characterize the Lord’s people.

Yet these considerations may cause feelings of undue discouragement to arise in the minds of some. They may say to themselves, “Yes, but I have sought

forgiveness for repetitions of the same offence again and again. I have thought each time I repented of it ; but my evil tendencies still overcome me, and I am ashamed to continue asking. Do not give way to feelings of this kind. When Peter asked the Saviour, "How often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? until seven times?" and Jesus replied, "I say not unto thee until seven times, but until seventy times seven," He laid down a principle of action which was to regulate our feelings towards our brethren ; and are we to suppose that our Father in heaven will act differently towards those whom He has admitted into His family through the adoption of children by Jesus Christ? Certainly not. And, though we thus place no limit to His pardoning grace, the humble believer, whose faith works by love, will not be induced on this account to presume upon it ; his language will rather be,—

My Father knows my feeble frame,
He knows how poor a worm I am,
Untold, He knows it all ;
The least temptation serves to draw
My footsteps from my Father's law,
And makes me slide and fall.

Of this I give Him daily proof,
And yet He does not cast me off,
But owns me still as His ;

He spares, He pities, He forgives
The most rebellious child that lives,
So great His patience is.

But shall I thence a pretext draw,
Again to violate His law ?

My soul revolts at this :
I'll love, and wonder, and adore,
And beg that I may sin no more,
Against such love as His.

We naturally connect the concluding petitions of our Lord's prayer, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil," with those solemn entreaties to watch as well as pray, made to His disciples when His own spirit was bowed down under temptations of which we have no conception, and whilst He was keenly sympathizing with His disciples in the prospect of those trials which were soon to come upon them.

"Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

"Watch ye, therefore, and pray always that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man."

These words speak for themselves; they need but little comment; but oh! they are of the greatest importance. Of what use will all our prayers for deliverance from evil be, if we are keeping no watch,

or heedlessly running into the way of temptation? And, again, of what use will all our watching be, if our prayer is not ever unto Him who alone can deliver us? In the one case, we are tempting God; in the other, we are either ignorant of His goodness or of our own weakness; and in either case our presumption may be fatal. And, moreover, the habit of prayer, unaccompanied with a watchful spirit, is a sure proof of insincerity of heart. It *may* become to such as have it the reverse of all that is good. Its tendency is to lull the voice of conscience, to deaden the spiritual perceptions, and to plunge the soul into the depths of hypocrisy and self-righteousness.

Besides the petitions included in our Lord's prayer, there are two special requests which *He* has invited or directed us to make. One is contained in these words:—

“If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children; how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him.”

Much of what I have hitherto said has applied more to the converted than to the unconverted, more to those who are already the disciples of Jesus than to those who have not yet given Him their hearts; but this request it belongs especially to the latter class to make. The child of God, he who has been born again of the Spirit, seeing that his body is the temple

of the Holy Ghost who dwelleth in him, needs not to ask afresh for the Spirit to be granted to him. His earnest and continual desire ought to be that he may be "filled with the Spirit;" and he needs again and again to ask "to be strengthened by God's Spirit in the inner man," and to know his wonder-working power to "sanctify him wholly;" but he has already received "the promise of the Spirit through faith," and it is his blessed privilege to know Him to be his guide, his teacher, and his comforter; the earnest of his heavenly inheritance, and that by which he is sealed unto the day of redemption.

My friends, how many of us have an humble hope that through God's mercy in Christ Jesus we have received this unspeakable gift? How many of us, by the fruits we manifest of love, of joy, of peace, of longsuffering, of gentleness and meekness, make it evident to others that the Spirit of our Father dwelleth in us? If any of us are sensible that we are *not* of this number, may such no longer delay in simple-hearted earnestness to ask for this blessing, and by faith lay hold of the gracious promise connected with the asking. He who only receives the good things this world has to give—its riches, comforts, enjoyments, honours; however much for a little while they may seem to gratify his thirst for happiness, *must* soon thirst again. Ere long all these will leave him; but he to whom God's Spirit has been given, has in

him a well of water springing up to everlasting life. And, as he walks in the Spirit, and allows himself to be led by Him, He will make him like the Saviour whom He has taught him to love ; and He will fit him to dwell with Him for ever.

Ask, then, for the Holy Spirit ; without Him we are powerless to contend with the devil, and to meet his subtle temptations ; and we shall eternally sink under the corruption of our own hearts. With Him we have life, and light, and strength. Without the Lord's Spirit, whatever else we may have, or whoever we may be, we are none of His ; for, " if any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of His." But, " as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God ;" cared for day by day, supplied with all that they need, watched with the tenderest love, protected from evil, and made heirs of the kingdom of heaven. There is indeed good reason why all should ask God to give them His Holy Spirit.

" The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few ; pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He will send forth labourers into His harvest."

This is the other request I have referred to. These words strikingly show how it has pleased our Lord in carrying out the great work for which He came into the world, very largely to engage the hearty co-operation of His people. It is not only that He

chooses from these some whom He entrusts with the ministry of reconciliation, and whom He qualifies by the power of his Spirit to deliver his message of love to a fallen world; but, as He has taught them daily to pray "Thy kingdom come," so too, He seems often to wait for their prayers before sending out labourers into the fields that are white unto the harvest. And it is when they realize most, that, as through His abounding mercy they are made partakers of *His* peace, and *His* joy, and *His* glory, so do they also share *His* sufferings and *His* work; that, as they are *co-heirs*, so also they are *co-workers*; it is, I say, when His people most realize this, that the more labourers are found flocking to His service, prepared beforehand for His work; the blessed result being that believers are the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women. And an unhealthy or forward activity in this service is kept within narrow limits, when there is a right apprehension of this injunction of our Lord's; for if it be our duty to pray that labourers may be sent into His harvest, it certainly implies that He, who is Lord of the harvest, has alone a right to send; and, moreover, that such need to be sent and empowered by Him before they can accomplish His work.

May we all take home these words of our Saviour as if addressed to us by Himself at this present hour. Especially would I urge this upon my fellow-members

of the Society of Friends; for, if, instead of the complaints often made one to another respecting the silence of our meetings, or the want of ministry, or as to the character of that which is sometimes offered amongst us, we were to pray to the Lord of the harvest; with importunity pray to Him, that He would send forth more labourers—labourers of the right sort—humble-minded, earnest-hearted, full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and that He would more abundantly bestow His blessing on those already at work, our complaints would often be changed to songs of gratitude and thanksgiving.

But why should any of us in the slightest degree limit our prayers or our interest to those of our own Society, and to the labourers within its borders? Why should not our interest be equally aroused for the tens of thousands around us, so many of whom are as sheep having no shepherd? Why should not our prayers equally arise for them, that labourers might be sent amongst them who should point them to the Lamb of God, labourers made wise by the Spirit to win souls? And why, when we see the many evils which are rampant in the Church at large, should we not make common cause with the earnest-hearted amongst the Lord's people, whatever their name among men, in beseeching Him to baptize us afresh with His Spirit, even as on the day of Pentecost.

LECTURE II.

PRAYER—(CONTINUED.)

CHAPTER III.

CHRIST'S EXAMPLE.

IN my last paper, how to pray, and what to pray for, formed the chief subjects for thought. In the one I am to read this evening, I shall consider the example of our Saviour in regard to prayer, and the promises which He has made to us that prayer shall be answered.

I approach the first of these subjects with hesitation; there is something so mysterious in the fact that He, to whom the poor and afflicted on all sides came to be healed of their diseases and even forgiven their sins, who raised the dead and commanded the winds and the seas and they obeyed Him—who “thought it not robbery to be equal with God,” should yet, when made in the likeness of man, kneel down and

pray to His Father, and our Father, that we shrink from speaking of it. We do this the more when we remember that His communion with the Father was not only the joyful intercourse of praise or of holy fellowship, but that there was a time, when, "being in an agony, He prayed more earnestly." But whilst we do well to approach the subject with very solemn feelings, we must not forget that those things which are revealed are for us and for our children; and perhaps the mystery that at first seems to shroud the fact of Jesus praying, is in part removed when we think of the words, "wherefore *in all things* it behoved Him to be made like unto His brethren." We see the prayers of the Saviour to be a part and a necessary part of that great mystery of godliness, "God manifest in the flesh." Our wonder is not that He should pray, but it is all the more fixed upon the fact that He "became flesh and dwelt among us."

A careful review of all those passages in the Gospels in which our Saviour is mentioned as praying will suggest to the mind of any one who makes such a review, many instructive and deeply interesting thoughts. We seem thus permitted to obtain a glimpse, however indistinct, of His inner life as He walked amongst men, and one which His outward acts do not to the same extent give us. Only a few of these thoughts can be alluded to now, as I wish to

confine myself to such remarks as bear directly upon the question, How far is the practice of our Saviour an example to His followers ?

We cannot fail to observe how Jesus loved to be *alone* in prayer, and how when He could not otherwise obtain the solitude He desired, He retired to mountains and desert places ; outward circumstances were not permitted to be hindrances to Him. But

What various hindrances *we* meet
In coming to the mercy seat ;

and “who that knows the worth of prayer” has not had to lament many occasions in which these hindrances have been allowed to cause neglect of this duty, even when communion with God was truly regarded not as a mere form, but as a means of refreshment and renewal of strength, and often of hallowed enjoyment. Circumstances, perhaps, have altered ; once it was easy to arrange for a time of quiet, and such occasions were looked forward to with pleasure ; but some difficulty now occurs, the tempter gets an advantage, time after time it is neglected, and, when not so, it is felt more as an irksome duty ; this again reacts upon the soul, and spiritual declension is the necessary consequence ; until, perhaps, some afflictive dispensation arouses the backslider in his downward course, brings him again to his knees, “ gives new

life to prayer," and afresh makes him feel the greatness of the privileges he has been neglecting. How many children of God have passed through experience like this, to whom the example of our Saviour affords a touching reproof.

Not that we should in any wise limit prayer to stated times, or consider any position of the body as at all necessary to it. Nothing that our Saviour said or did would encourage such limitations. He was frequently engaged in prayer whilst His disciples or the multitude were around Him. The humble believer on all occasions may appear in spirit before the mercy seat; he has but to lift up his heart to his Father in heaven, and he knows that he is heard. And his endeavour is, or ought to be, so to control his feelings and temper, and the engagements of his mind, that they need never prevent him from doing this. But this continual lifting up of the heart to God, and this endeavour to preserve the mind in a right state before Him, ought by no means to satisfy us. We need frequently to be wholly withdrawn from outward things, we need to enter our closet and be alone with God, we need occasions in which we can examine both our outward and our inner lives before Him in a way we cannot do when in the midst of our daily avocations. We see that our Saviour sought occasions of this kind; and it is striking to observe the frequency

with which these occurred in the night, and in the early morning. When, in addition to these things, we remember the example of David, of Daniel, and, as far as we can gather, of the apostles also, we cannot but conclude that, though prayer should by no means be confined to stated times, yet stated times for prayer are all but essential to healthy spiritual life.

Again, it is interesting to notice how before several of the great changes in our Saviour's life, and before what appear to us the most important steps taken in it, He is specially mentioned as having been engaged in prayer. Is there not a gracious design in our being told that it was whilst He was praying that the Holy Ghost descended upon Him? that the night before He chose His apostles was spent by Him in prayer? that it was as He prayed that He was transfigured? that it was immediately after prayer that He raised Lazarus from the dead? that He was in an agony as He prayed before His betrayal and crucifixion? and that His last words upon the cross were words of prayer?

I have already observed how blessed a thing it is to be able even in all our comparatively trifling concerns to make God our counsellor; and, if we need His counsel in these things, still more do we need it in making those changes which more evidently affect all our future life. How, indeed, can any who believe

that their heavenly Father hears and answers prayer, make choice of their occupation in life, form marriage connections, take a partner in business, remove their place of residence from one town or neighbourhood to another, allow themselves to be placed in any influential position in the world, or take any other important step in life without very earnest prayer for Divine guidance on the occasion? Many of these changes result from very trifling circumstances, so that, almost imperceptibly to ourselves, we are sometimes impelled towards a course of action over which we feel to have little or no control; therefore the importance of frequent prayer in regard to what appear our trifling concerns. Often, however, it is quite otherwise; often there is abundant time for calm and prayerful consideration; and he who neglects this does it in spite of our Saviour's example.

It would be useless to try to impress this duty upon those who are not seeking to conform their conduct to the Divine will, whose object in life it is to please themselves and promote their own worldly interest, or on those who do not believe that God condescends intelligibly to answer such prayers as these. And it might be supposed that those who profess to have this faith, and who are seeking to act in accordance with the Divine will, would need no remarks to be made upon the subject. But the Bible, and history, and

the facts of every-day life convince us that many who know much of the power of religion in their own hearts often err in this respect. The history of Lot is an affecting proof of this. They were circumstances over which he had full control which placed him in the land of Sodom. It was his own deliberate choice. He saw the fruitfulness of the land, it was adapted to his flocks and herds; he saw, so he thought, that to go there would be to increase his wealth; but he entirely left out of his consideration other circumstances which had far more to do with his happiness, and the happiness of his family, than the increase of his wealth. Had he asked counsel of God, we cannot doubt what the result would have been; but this he neglected, *he chose for himself*, and the evil consequences of his choice we well know. His family were ruined in every respect, and if he escaped he was truly a brand plucked out of the burning. Yet he was one of the Lord's people, and his righteous soul was vexed from day to day with the unlawful deeds of those among whom he had chosen to cast himself.

The case of Jehoshaphat is equally instructive. He was a man in many respects devoted to the Lord; he took great pains to instruct his subjects in the law of God; he was anxious to root out of his dominions all traces of idolatry; he was particular in asking

counsel of the Lord before he engaged in war; he applied to Him in distress, and displayed a wonderful trust in His protection and guidance in a time of great difficulty. And the Lord blessed him accordingly, and for a time he proved a great blessing to his people. But in an evil hour, apparently under the influence of a spirit exalted by the "riches and honour which he had in abundance," "he joined affinity with Ahab." There seems to have been here no asking for Divine direction, and probably little thought of how important a step he was taking. But what was the consequence? His son married Ahab's daughter. She introduced the worship of Baal into the kingdom of Judah, her husband and her son both joined heartily in her evil doings, till that kingdom which Jehoshaphat had so carefully ruled and taught, and which had prospered so during his reign, was in his grandson's days brought to the verge of ruin. And all this was evidently to be traced to that one wrong step taken without consulting the Lord, and persisted in (for it was as hard then as now to break off a connection once improperly made), after His displeasure had been manifested.

I would affectionately urge my *young* friends especially to consider these things. You have probably many important steps yet to take, and many connections, whether of business or affection, more or less

binding yet to make. Acknowledge the Lord in all these things. Take Him for your guide and counsellor ; and, whilst this is the case, let your path be smooth or rough, you will at least have peace of mind in the consciousness of having so acted—a peace amounting at times to a firm assurance that it is the Lord who has placed you in your allotment, and that you are where He would have you to be—an assurance the blessedness of which you will indeed know in times of trial and affliction. But if, instead of acting thus, you self-confidently choose for yourselves, you little know what may be the consequences.

There are few lessons which the example of our Saviour in prayer more plainly teaches than this, that it is our duty to pray both for our friends and our enemies ; for those who, like Peter, may be ready to follow us to prison and even unto death, and for those also who despitefully use us and persecute us. We are not unwilling to pray for our friends, yet how often either our selfishness or our scepticism as to the efficacy of intercessory prayer shows itself in the meagre way in which we make use of it on their behalf. How very different is our practice from that of the Apostle Paul. In how many of his epistles he uses language like this—“ God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the Gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my

prayers." And thus bearing upon his heart before God both his fellow-labourers and those on whose behalf they laboured together, what a blessing was he to the churches. Not that we should attempt to imitate his example, by trying in prayer to think of all our friends and acquaintances, and then in a forced manner to offer up some petition for them ; unless our requests are such as we can make with real feeling, they will be of no avail either for ourselves or others. Some of our hearts, moreover, appear to be too narrow to be capable of taking within their limits more than a small circle of acquaintances. But if this small circle, those with whom we most frequently associate, our nearest relations, our servants, assistants, and workpeople, and the church with whom we are accustomed to unite in public worship, were made day by day the subjects of real prayer by each of us, I believe our own hearts would thereby be greatly enlarged, the bonds of Christian affection would be much more closely felt, and a rich outpouring of heavenly blessings would flow in answer to our prayers.

Then as to praying for our enemies. Most of us may not know that we have any ; but there are few of us who are not at times greatly pained by the conduct of others, respecting whom we may find it difficult to keep from hard and censorious thoughts.

These are they for whom we should pray ; not that they may be made to feel how wrongly they have acted to us, but heartily and sincerely that the richest blessings may come down upon them from above. How would all our painful differences be nipped in the bud if this were our practice.

CHAPTER IV.

PROMISES.

LEAVING the example of our Saviour, let us ask the question, to what extent have we a right to expect that our prayers will be answered? and we will confine our attention to those promises which Our Lord has made to us on this subject. In the eleventh of Luke we meet with these familiar words:—

“ And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children; how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him! ”

Here let us notice that we have not merely the bare assurance, that if we ask we shall receive; but

that no one may think himself too insignificant to be noticed above, we have the gracious addition that *every* one that asketh receiveth, &c. Nor is this all ; we are also told in the strongest manner, by an appeal to our feelings as fathers, that our heavenly Father has *pleasure* in granting our requests. If we saw a child who had lost its home crying for food, we should feel quite sure if we brought it to its father that he would at once attend to its wants, and that he would have the *greatest pleasure* in doing so. Our faith is so strong in a father's love, that we could never doubt this. Why, then, should we not have yet more faith in our heavenly Father's love ? why do we not go to Him with our wants, with the full assurance that He will not withhold from us anything that would be good for us ?

A few limitations, however, this appeal to us as fathers enables us to place upon the fulness of these promises. For instance, the wise and loving father would not give to his child what he knew would prove hurtful to him, however earnestly he might ask for it ; and again, if the child could get what he was wishing to have, without receiving it immediately from himself as a gift, by a little effort and painstaking of his own, the father would not encourage indolence by at once granting his request ; but instead, would put him in the way of obtaining it for himself.

Besides these promises we have another three times repeated, as Jesus conversed with his disciples the evening before His crucifixion.

John xiv. 13, 14.—“ And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it.”

John xv. 16.—“ Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain; that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, He may give it you.”

John xvi. 23, 24.—“ And in that day ye shall ask me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, He will give it you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.”

Connected with these almost unlimited promises, we find one condition which was as yet new to the disciples, viz., that they should ask in their Saviour's name. And this condition was not added in any way to restrain their prayers within a narrower channel; but on the contrary to increase their confidence that each one would reach the ear of the Most High. Many had rejoiced in a sense of sin forgiven, and of prayer being heard, during the thousands of years that passed before Christ lived in the world and died and rose again. The sacrifices continually

offered upon the altar, and the intercession of the high priest, affording a faint glimpse of something more real and more enduring, had often been the means of strengthening the faith of these. But who can tell the increase of holy confidence with which the poor sinner, fixing his eyes upon the cross, now seeks the forgiveness of his sins, compared with what it must have been before that amazing proof of God's love had been manifested. And so with prayer. The full permission to make our requests in the name of God's beloved Son, the sinless One ; the assurance that He presents them, that through His gracious mediation, our feeble prayers and most imperfect thanksgivings arise as sweet incense before the throne of grace ; what can give us greater confidence as we draw near to God in prayer ?

The promises contained in the eleventh of Luke, and the seventh of Matthew, seem incomplete without the three just mentioned. Those are indeed exceedingly comprehensive ; but they allow the tempter to suggest that a favourable answer may be entirely dependent upon the righteousness of the suppliant ; but by these every fear on this head is shewn to be groundless, seeing that it is Christ's righteousness and not our own, under the shelter of which we come into the presence of God ; and it is by the faith that lays hold of this that we have access unto Him.

We come now to another promise made by our Saviour, and to another condition connected with this promise, which it is very important we should carefully consider.

Mark xi. 24. "Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them."

At first sight this appears a condition difficult to understand. It might seem as if our warrant to believe that we shall receive the things we ask for, is our own belief that we shall receive them; but this would be absurd, for how can we believe in the first place without some ground for our belief?

When Christ was on the earth He had many requests made to Him; people came on all sides to be cured of their own diseases, to have their children or their servants healed, or to know what they were to do to enter into the kingdom of heaven. We do not read that any of these were sent away unanswered. But there were some requests with which He did not comply. When Martha asked Him to bid her sister Mary help her; when the Jews asked for a sign; when the covetous man asked Him to bid his brother divide the inheritance between them; when James and John asked Him if they should call for fire to come down from heaven upon the village

that refused to receive Him ; when the mother of the same two asked Him that her sons might sit the one on his right hand and the other on His left in his kingdom, He did not do what they desired. Yet some of these requests were made by his disciples whom He loved with a special love. And we are taught hereby that we may be quite mistaken as to what is good for us, and that we may often make requests which it may not please our Father in heaven to grant, even though we join with them the name of Jesus and entreat with importunity and humility. Paul tells us of a petition he made which was not granted. "There was given me," says he, "a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee : for my strength is made perfect in weakness."

There are many requests which we know very well it would be in vain to make ; there are others about which we may be in doubt, and it would be foolish and useless to try to force ourselves to *believe* these will be granted, *in order* that we may obtain the answer. We must, I repeat it, have some ground for our belief before we are able to believe. But again, there are very many requests which we may

make with perfect confidence that we shall obtain what we ask for; and to these most certainly our Saviour's words apply when He says, "What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them and ye shall have them." But what are these? In the first place, all those blessings which we find promised to us in the Bible.

Where God has given us a promise, we are not only warranted to expect the fulfilment of it, but *it is our duty to expect it*; and we dishonour God if we doubt the fulfilment of it. The apostle James says, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him; but let him *ask in faith* nothing wavering; for he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, driven of the wind and tossed. Let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord." And so we may say with regard to everything else which God has promised.

I long that we all had a much higher estimate of the value of these promises; so that when one is presented to our minds, as we read our Bibles, or as we quietly wait upon the Lord, or as our hearts are turned to Him as we walk by the way, we may lay hold of it as part of our rich inheritance in Christ Jesus; and, earnestly pleading it before the mercy seat, see to it that we do not fail of receiving the

blessing; remembering that the words applied by the Holy Spirit to one of the greatest of them, may be considered as applicable to them all; "I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them."

A beautiful instance of this pleading of the promises occurs in the history of Jacob. When he was at Bethel the Lord solemnly renewed that covenant with him which He had made with Abraham and Isaac, adding, "I will bring thee again to this land." For twenty years the remembrance of these promises served to cheer him in his times of trouble; but when, in obedience to the Divine command, he was on his way back to his father's house, and met his brother Esau coming to meet him with an armed force, his faith was sorely tried. Humanly speaking, there seemed hardly a chance of escape; but he had no doubt of the promises having been made to him, and his only hope was in pleading these with Him who had given them to him. "O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac," said he, "the Lord *who saidst unto me*, Return unto thy country, and unto thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee: I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast showed unto thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan, and now I am become two bands. De-

liver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau ; for I fear him lest he should come and smite me, and the mother with the children. *And thou saidst*, I will surely do thee good, and make thy seed as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude." Having thus cast himself upon the Lord's faithfulness, he employed every means that prudence could suggest to avert the dreaded evil. His was not a blind confidence that the Lord would save whether he acted wisely or no, yet he felt that everything he could do would be utterly useless without the Lord's blessing. So when all had been done, everything arranged, again in the evening he betook himself to prayer. "And Jacob was left alone ; and there wrestled a man with him till the breaking of the day." Of what passed that night we know but little ; but this at least we may gather from the sacred page, that Jacob clung by faith to the promises, and that this enabled him to say, "I will not let thee go except thou bless me."

We are not likely to receive a promise from God spoken audibly as were these ; but in Holy Writ we have many "exceedingly great and precious promises," which we have as much right to plead with God as Jacob had ; and which we ought also to plead, believing we shall receive the things we ask for.

It would take a long time to recount but a small

portion of these, but we may dwell for a short time upon a very few. The promise that God would give His Holy Spirit to them that ask Him, has already been alluded to. This blessing, this unspeakably glorious blessing, great beyond our comprehension, involving in its bestowal results of such infinite importance, should be asked for in faith. It is not for us to say, "if it be Thy will," for His will to those that believe His word has already been made plain; to ask thus implies that we doubt respecting the promise, that we waver; and "let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord."

Again, it may be we are in perplexity as to the path of duty, or we are thinking of taking some important step in life; and we are sincerely anxious to know the Lord's will, and to do it. There are few subjects on which we shall find more promises than on this.

"I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye." "In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths." "Thine ear shall hear a voice behind thee, saying, this is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left." "The Lord shall guide thee continually," &c. Now, if we plead these promises in faith, making good use at the same time of those

faculties which God has given us to see what is right and to avoid the wrong ; taking care that our eye is single to do His will ; and that we are not consulting our own inclinations, and trying to make out that God wishes what we wish ; if, I say, we are acting thus, we may depend upon it we shall not be suffered to go far wrong.

An aged and highly honoured minister of the Gospel, one who has had to pass through much trial, and has seen many changes in life, speaks thus with regard to God's faithfulness to these promises. His way of acting at such times is worthy of example. "I will tell you," said he, "how I do when in perplexity about any change of path. First, I take my Bible and look at all the promises of direction in such a case as mine. Then I honestly pray for right direction. Then I try to examine the thing to the best of my ability, searching my motives for the change, and whether there is any one which I should not like to be known, or of which I feel ashamed myself. Then I try to get into a state of stillness, gathering my thoughts up before the Lord, and endeavouring to wait upon Him. Well, after this, sometimes I have had to make the decision without any light on my path to my own apprehension ; but *in not one case in my long life have I found that I had been left to myself*, but I have been permitted to see that the step taken was in my heavenly Father's ordering."

Then a parent finds this promise, or rather assurance, "The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear Him, and His righteousness unto children's children; to such as keep His covenant, and to those that remember His commandments to do them." And again, "I will pour out my Spirit on thy seed, and my blessing on thine offspring." What parent but would wish to plead in faith such promises as these; but let him notice the condition, "to such as keep His covenant, and to those that remember His commandments to do them."

Then again, "The Lord God is a sun and shield: the Lord will give grace and glory: no good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly." How full is this promise. And again, "Open thy mouth wide and I will fill it." Our Father is pleased that we should ask for much, we honour Him by trusting to His mercy and believing in His love. And His mercy is upon us according as we hope in Him. He that hopes for little gets little; he that hopes for much gets more. No doubt it often pleases Him, in His abounding love, to give "exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think," as in the case of the poor palsied man, who came to be healed, and who went away with the assurance that his sins were forgiven also; but those other words are also true: "*As thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee.*"

Oh, if we dwell on the riches laid up for us in Christ Jesus, and then think how dwarfish, and weak, and wanting we are, notwithstanding all our privileges, and all the gracious promises made to us ; well may we take to heart the words of the apostle, “ Ye have not because ye ask not ; ye ask and receive not because ye ask amiss.”

But there are also occasions when the Christian can find no promise in the Bible just applicable to his desires ; but when his heart is so drawn out in prayer for some particular object, not evidently at variance with God’s mercy and love, that the very fact of his heart being so drawn out is a ground for him to believe that God intends to answer his request. I do not mean when any one has great fluency in prayer ; this may be all deceptive. What I mean is, when something seems laid upon a man’s heart, when it recurs to him again and again during the day, causing him, whenever he thinks of it, almost to groan in prayer for it. This, I say, should encourage him to believe that God intends to grant his desire. He may ask in faith. And why ?

All true prayer is the breathing of the Holy Spirit in our hearts ; and whilst, perhaps, most frequently He so operates as by no means clearly to indicate whence the desires arise, simply causing us to feel our wants, and pointing us to the source from which they

may be supplied, yet He sometimes acts otherwise. And when we feel these strong drawings to prayer, it is somewhat of an evidence that it is He who is inspiring our prayer. And in proportion to the strength of this evidence should be our faith that the answer will be given ; for He does not lead us to pray for that which is not in accordance with the Divine will. “ For we know not what we should pray for as we ought ; but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And He that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because He maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.” Some of us lose, I believe, by not giving up to this desire to pray when we feel it pressing upon us. We think the time is unsuitable ; we will leave it for a more convenient season. But the opportunity slips away ; and when the time we have usually devoted to prayer arrives, the desires have left us, and we find barrenness instead.

Whilst speaking of the Spirit’s influence in prayer, I might further remark, how often to those who value the promises does He bring to their memory sometimes one, sometimes another, with such sweetness and such adaptation to their wants as greatly to strengthen their faith. Nor is this confined to the *promises*. How often the *prayers* recorded in the

Bible are thus brought home to the seeking soul, encouraging him to believe that as these have been answered before, so they will be answered to himself.

But there are many occasions when we find no promise applicable to us, and when, too, we have not confidence that the Spirit of God inspires our prayer. Strange as it may seem, the example of our blessed Saviour is our guide here, when, during the agony in the garden, He said, "Nevertheless, not what I will, but what Thou wilt." In such cases let there be complete submission to the will of God; and, though unable to believe unhesitatingly that we shall receive the things we ask for, our faith should be firm as ever that our Father will withhold from us no good thing, and that what he pleases is really best for us. Oh, what tales of sorrow should we hear told, even by some of the Lord's own children, if they were to make known but a small part of what they have had to suffer, when, having persisted unsubmissively in pleading with God for what He knew would prove a curse to them, He has taught them their folly by granting their request. Mothers who have prayed thus for the lives of their children, and afterwards have been ready to thank God when they have been taken away. Others who have prayed for the removal of some trial, and have found that its removal brought something tenfold worse. Others, who have prayed that certain

duties might not devolve upon them, and have continued to pray till they were unfitted to perform them, and for years afterwards have been like birds that have wandered from their nests. Like the Israelites of old, when they murmured for flesh meat, "the Lord granted their request, but sent leanness into their souls." He is very far from being grieved with us for giving expression to our desires in cases like these; and if we do so in full submission to His will, we shall gain and not lose thereby. For, if we do not obtain what we ask for, it may be that, like Paul, we shall receive the strengthening assurance, "My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness." Our very trials shall thus become subjects for thankful rejoicing; so that, to some extent, we may be able even to join with him when he added, "Therefore, I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in persecutions for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then am I strong."

Before concluding what I have to say on prayer in faith, I should like to draw attention to what appears to me an error, and not a very uncommon one, with some earnest and active Christians. I mean the asking for blessings which the petitioner has no expectation of receiving. A good man, at a prayer meeting, after asking for the conversion of those in the room with him, and then for his neighbours,

his heart warming as he proceeded, at length included the whole world in his prayer, and that night was fixed upon as the time when his prayer should be answered. As he left the meeting, a Christian friend, wishing gently to rebuke him, said to him very seriously, "What a glorious day it will be to-morrow!" "Indeed," said he, "what do you mean?" "Why, how glorious it will be when we wake to-morrow to find the whole world converted to the Lord Jesus Christ." "But," he replied, "you surely are not so foolish as to believe it will be so." "Did you not pray for it?" "Yes—but—." But he had never had the least expectation that his prayer would be granted, nor had he the least ground for expecting it. And therefore it would have been much better to have never offered such a prayer.

Prayers like this betray, as it appears to me, much ignorance of ourselves, and sad misconception with regard to our heavenly Father. There is much in His dealings with us altogether inscrutable to our finite minds, and among these things is the fact that it has pleased Him in the conversion of sinners very largely to employ human agency. This we see to be the case, and yet whilst He is full of love, waiting to be gracious, pleading with one and another by His Spirit, what sort of a testimony are we meanwhile bearing for Him. How are we, by our eager pursuit

of the comforts and enjoyments of life, by our evident living for ourselves instead of for Him, by the way in which we make this world our home, by our unwillingness to deny ourselves even a little for His sake, instead of assisting forward His work, too often laying stumbling-blocks in the way of others. And yet some of us can pray to God to convert the world, as if we were more benevolent than He, and would try to move *Him* to compassion. Oh, that we understood more our own innate selfishness, and His pure, boundless love, that so in our petitions for others, instead of wasting our energies in asking for what we have no ground for expecting, we might seek more earnestly for the wisdom and the grace that should enable us thoroughly to fill up our little measure of service, in accordance with His loving will.

I shall leave my subject incomplete if I do not allude to one other promise of our gracious Lord, which seems intended to encourage united prayer; that is our meeting together for prayer, and agreeing together as to what we should pray for.

Matt. xviii. 19. "Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

It would seem from the promises hitherto brought forward that every thing, at least every good thing, had already been engaged to be granted to the humble believing suppliant; what occasion then for this special promise to two agreeing together? In the first place it seems intended to encourage us to meet together in the name of Jesus, that *together* we may seek his blessing. And, secondly, it may have somewhat special reference to petitions offered up for the Church, and for the advancement of Christ's kingdom: leading us to conclude that if a few of His disciples, gathered together in His name, He being consequently present with them, are led to believe that the granting of a certain request would tend to God's glory and the good of the Church, and agree together in praying for this object, they have a warrant to believe that their request will be granted.

For instance, let a few living Christians, who feel the need of sound Gospel ministry in their assemblies, agree in praying that God would give them faithful ministers, pastors according to His heart, who should feed them with knowledge and understanding; they may pray for this in the full belief that their prayer will be granted. Or let them in like manner agree in praying that God would pour out the gracious influences of His Spirit on themselves, on the Church, and on the neighbourhood around them; if

they themselves are prepared for this, prepared to take their part in the duties which might then devolve upon them, they, too, may look with confidence for an answer. And the granting of their request may, humanly speaking, depend upon their praying in faith. Of course all that has been said before will apply here. Such prayer must be in deep humility, in dependence upon the Saviour. There must be no hypocrisy about it, no secret desire to gain the praise or notice of men, no selfish aim in it. Besides this they may have to wait, it may be for long; their faith may be often sorely tried; but if they have learned the lesson that "men ought always to pray and not to faint," they will find as they hold fast their confidence that it has not been misplaced, and they will receive the very things they ask for.

Yes, the very things they have asked for, though probably in a way very different from what they had expected. They may have prayed for a more earnest Gospel ministry in their assemblies, and they may have expected the answer in the coming of some gifted stranger, with eloquent speech and a heart full of love to God and to the souls of men. Instead of this they may feel themselves called to minister. They attempt it often in much weakness and with many fears and tremblings, but, God's grace accom-

panying them, they gradually grow bolder in proclaiming the love and power of their Saviour, till others are brought into the liberty of the Gospel through their means. Or the answer may come in a different way still,—in their being taught that the arrangements they make for the exercise of the ministry are not in accordance with the counsels of God, and that they must give more liberty for the free working of his gifts before the blessing can be granted. However this may be, let them perseveringly plead the promises of their God, and sooner or later, *as they follow His leadings*, the blessing will come.

Then, too, as regards the prayer for a powerful outpouring of the gracious influences of the Spirit upon ourselves and on those around us. I sometimes think in reference to this petition the words of our Saviour to His two disciples are very applicable, “Ye know not what ye ask ; can ye drink of the cup that I drink of, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with ?” It is vain to expect that this prayer will be answered whilst we ourselves are living in carelessness and indolence. If our desires for the salvation of those around us are worth anything, they will lead us not only to pray for them, but self-denyingly to labour for them also. Prayer to be answered must be sincere ; but how can we suppose ourselves

for one moment to be sincere or in earnest with regard to the salvation of our neighbours, when we ask God to plead by his Spirit with them, if from day to day, and from week to week, and from year to year, we hardly say a word to them which we can honestly suppose would help them to take one step in fleeing from the wrath to come. And yet many of these perhaps we meet with almost daily, and talk with them about anything else, but are afraid to speak with them about the one thing which is of most importance.

Prayer for these is doubtless the natural manner in which we can first manifest our desires for their welfare. We feel our utter incompetency to help them without Divine assistance ; we feel our want of qualification to speak a word that shall be of use ; we fear doing harm rather than good ; but we must take care that these feelings do not become excuses for our indolence or want of courage. It is right that they should lead us to pray for our neighbours, and for ourselves too, that we may have strength and ability for duty ; but what I wish to insist upon is that our prayers are of little value if they lead to nothing more. But if they do lead to something more, if they lead us in humility, but yet with earnestness ; with simplicity, and yet with wisdom, to seek to enlist one and another in our Lord's service, oh, what an effect

it would have on our daily life and conversation. How should we fear casting stumbling-blocks in the way of those for whom we prayed, and whom we were anxious to bring to the Saviour. And then what an influence would our careful, yet cheerful and happy walk, a walk that plainly showed that we believed and therefore spoke, a walk that made it manifest to all, to whom we belonged and whom we loved and served; what an influence for good, I say, would this walk have in silently testifying to others of the power of the grace of God!

My friends, are we prepared for a work that shall have this effect upon us? Have we counted the costs, and are we prepared to make the sacrifices of one kind or other that a powerful out-pouring of the Holy Spirit may require from us? Are there two or three in this company who can say, "We are able to drink of this cup, and to be baptized with this baptism?" If there are, then let them agree together in praying for this blessing, and let them pray in faith.

But, if we shrink from the consequences, if we prefer going on in our easy, lifeless, indolent profession of Christianity, let us at least consider what we shall have to say when our Lord demands of us, "Give an account of thy stewardship for thou mayest be no longer steward." And let us not say within

ourselves, that the heaven above us is brass and the earth beneath us is iron, when in truth it is our own indolence and cowardliness in the service of our Saviour which is the cause of our barrenness. He is ever waiting to be gracious, and to bestow on those who seek Him with their whole heart an abundant store of the rich blessings He has promised. He yet says, "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it."

LECTURE III.

OUR SAVIOUR'S CONVERSATION WITH
NICODEMUS.

CHAPTER I.

“YE MUST BE BORN AGAIN.”

THE conversation recorded in the third chapter of John's Gospel appears to have taken place soon after our Saviour began his public ministry. He was then at Jerusalem, where He had but a short time before cast the buyers and sellers out of the temple, and otherwise manifested His miraculous power. Nicodemus, a Pharisee and one of the Sanhedrim, was afraid what might be said or done if it should be known that he had sought an interview with Jesus ; he chose therefore to come after the sun had set. We may blame him for his want of courage, and contrast his conduct with that of many others ; but let us not judge him harshly. It was better that he should

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come secretly than not at all. Jesus did not upbraid him for it, and he learned more boldness when he knew Him better.

We are not told what his object was in coming. "Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God, for no man can do these miracles which thou doest except God be with him," is all that he is represented as saying when he introduced himself. Yet, from our Saviour's reply to this remark, it is not improbable, nay, it is almost certain, that he came seeking an answer to a question of the utmost importance; one which from that day to this has never ceased more or less to agitate the minds of men: "How can I enter into the kingdom of God?" He had so far accepted the Saviour's mission as to acknowledge Him as a teacher sent from God, though afraid openly to avow Him as such; and the pains he took to obtain an interview with Him, imply the existence of some heart-problem which he longed to have solved, and the solution of which he was hoping to obtain from Him. But whatever we may suppose respecting the object which Nicodemus had in coming, the Saviour's reply and subsequent conversation form without doubt *His* answer to this all-important question when put, and as such they have ever been regarded. Consequently there are few of our Saviour's discourses which have obtained such close attention on the part of

those who are asking the way to the kingdom of heaven.

There was something startling in the words, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." They were calculated to arrest attention, and lead to further inquiry. Nicodemus could not understand them. He saw that Jesus intended to teach the absolute necessity of some great change to himself and to all; but he had no idea as to the character of it, and asked for further explanation. Jesus replied, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." The change, then, was shewn to be a spiritual change, and one which was to be of so searching a character as to be fitly represented as a new birth, as the commencement of a new life; whilst the solemn asseveration was again repeated, that without this change it is impossible to enter into the kingdom of God.

What is the character of this great change? How is it that it is necessary? How is it to be brought about? How are we to know whether we have experienced it? These, with many other questions, at once occur to the anxious inquirer.

Before attempting to reply to them, let me remark that, if this change was necessary *after* our Saviour

came into the world, it must have been equally so *before*. Was it taught by Moses and the prophets? "Art thou a teacher in Israel and knowest not these things?" implies that it was. And yet it seems to have been taught so indistinctly that we cannot wonder at its appearing a new doctrine; it is not only immortality, but *life* also, that is brought to light by the Gospel. If, however, we take the first and great commandment of the law, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart," &c., and compare it with the words of Jeremiah, "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked," we cannot but conclude that a complete change must take place in man's heart before this command will be obeyed, and that that change must come from some source beyond himself. And to those who were living in open disregard of the law of God the same lesson was plainly taught. For when the ungodly are called to turn unto the Lord, "Turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye die;" "Turn ye unto me from whom ye have revolted;" "Rend your hearts and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord," is it not the need of *conversion* which is clearly set forth? Then again there are other passages in the Psalms and the Prophets in which allusion is made to a "new heart," to a "heart of flesh" in the place of a heart of stone, which evidently point to the same lesson.

If, leaving the Old Testament, we turn to the teaching of our Saviour and His apostles, we find in a variety of figures, and in different modes of expression, the same truth again and again repeated. "Born again;" "Born of the word of God;" "A new creature;" "Put off the old man and put on the new;" "The washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost;" "Transformed by the renewing of the mind;" "Repent ye and be converted;" "Have passed from death unto life." These and other terms, though not exactly synonymous—one having reference to the change as regarded from one point of view, and another as regarded from another—all unite in teaching the same lesson, in proclaiming as Jesus did to Nicodemus, "Ye *must* be born again."

CHAPTER II.

THE UNRENEWED HEART.

AND this is altogether consistent with what we are taught in Scripture respecting the heart of man before it is thus renewed ; for, if its state be such as is there described, the necessity of the change is most apparent. Allusion has already been made to the description of it in Jeremiah, as “deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.” In the New Testament the unrenewed man is spoken of as being in a state of darkness ; as not having the love of God in him ; as being at enmity with God ; as being dead in trespasses and sins ; not only utterly unfit for mingling with the holy spirits in heaven, but utterly unable to find any enjoyment there.

If, then, the depravity of the human heart is the ground for the necessity of the change of which we are speaking, it may be profitable to dwell a little longer on this subject. For if we misapprehend the character of the disease which sin has brought upon us, or if we are deceived as to its intensity, we shall in all probability mistake the remedy, or think lightly

about seeking the Physician. But we must be on our guard lest we fall into errors either on the right hand or the left. If we do so, if we keep close to Scripture; not drawing inferences where it draws none, or straining expressions that are strictly figurative beyond their natural signification; we shall, I believe, find that, dark as the picture is which is there drawn of the unrenewed heart, it is perfectly in unison with our own experience, with what we know of the workings of our own minds and of those of others.

Take, for instance, what our Saviour said to the Jews: "I know you that ye have not the love of God in you." Love to God is one of the fruits of the Spirit, it is throughout the Bible spoken of as a mark of the child of God, and a broad distinct line is drawn between those that love God and those that love him not. The great object of the preaching of the Gospel is to reconcile man to God; but if man already loved Him he would not need to be reconciled. The absence of this love is, then, one of the marks of the unrenewed heart; and this is a matter of fact which we may each in measure observe for ourselves. Let me try to make this plain.

We are all conscious of the delight we experience in being with those we love; we enjoy conversing with them; we like to feel that we are near them. We hasten to tell them of our joys and sorrows, we

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let them share in the deepest emotions of our hearts.
And in full accordance with this law of our nature
are the feelings which the loving child of God has
towards Him. He can often truly say,

In thy presence I am happy,
In thy presence I'm secure,
In thy presence all afflictions
I can easily endure.
In thy presence I can conquer,
I can suffer, I can die ;
Far from thee I faint and languish :
O my Saviour, keep me nigh !

And again :

Lord it is not life to live,
If thy presence thou deny ;
Lord, if thou thy presence give,
Then it is not death to die.

But has the unconverted man this delight in the
presence of his God ? Does he enjoy to feel himself
alone with Him ? Does he feel that he cannot live
without frequent communion with Him by prayer ?
Does he naturally, in his hours of enjoyment, turn to
Him to give expression to his grateful feelings ? or in
his sorrows does he flee to Him as the troubled child
to his mother's lap ? It is not so, he knows it is not.
It is with him as with Adam. Whilst Adam loved
God His presence with him in the garden was sought

and enjoyed, but when he had sinned no sooner did he hear God's voice than he went and hid himself. It is impossible that any man can love God and enjoy communion with Him, till he knows those sins that separate between himself and Him, to be put away by the blood of Jesus.

Again, if the objects of our love are absent, how often are they in our thoughts, and how pleasant it is to think of them. If a letter is received from them, how eagerly is it opened and read. But these are not the feelings of the unconverted towards God. "God is not in all his thoughts." He does not say with the Psalmist, "My meditation of Him shall be sweet; I will be glad in the Lord." If thoughts of Him do occur to his mind they bring no emotions of delight, nor has he pleasure in opening those letters which his Father in heaven has written to him, to tell him how He loves and cares for him, how He has provided for him a mansion above, and what a free invitation He gives him to spend his eternity with Him. To him those precious letters are too often dry and dull, and he takes little or no *personal* interest in them.

Again, it is a great delight to us to please those we love. What sacrifices young people will often make with this object. How continually the question occurs to us in relation to anything we are doing,

Will it please the object of our love or not? Do those who are still unrenewed feel thus towards God? Have they any *pleasure* in doing his will? Can they say "I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea, thy law is within my heart," as the humble-minded believer often can? Do they, indeed, really care whether they please Him or not, except so far as they may be fearful of the consequences of not doing so; *love* having nothing to do with it?

Again, as it is most delightful to us to please those we love, so when we know that we have displeased them and caused them pain, it deeply distresses us; it distresses us in proportion to our love. And this holds good with God's true-born loving children towards Himself. Nothing brings more deep anguish to one of these, when once aroused to the sense of it, than the fact of his having fallen into open sin, and thereby grieved and dishonoured his Saviour. Nor, if such has been the case, can he find any rest to his soul till he has again and again confessed it with bitter tears before the Lord. It is not the fear of punishment that makes him feel thus; though fully conscious of the pardoning love of Him with whom he has to do, the remembrance of his sin will sometimes long continue to be a source of the deepest grief. It was no fear of the Lord's anger that suddenly came over Peter and made him go out and

weep bitterly. No ; it was when He, whom he had so basely denied in His hour of trouble, turned and looked upon him ; nor would he have felt that look as he did if he had not loved Him deeply. But do the unconverted feel thus in reference to their sins ? At times they are distressed about them, death and hell and the wrath of God may make them very uneasy, nay, even terribly afraid ; but they do not grieve because of their ingratitude in sinning against a God of such love ; they would repent directly if they did so ; and the very fact that they do not at once repent when made sensible of their sins, proves that the love of God does not dwell in them.

And thus we might go on applying several other tests, all tending to shew that facts are in unison with the Scripture doctrine, that in the unconverted man there is no love to God ; but what has already been said will, I trust, prove sufficient for my present purpose. And this is not to enable us by these means to judge of one another's condition—very far from it, nor am I anxious merely to enforce a doctrine ; but I want us honestly to apply these tests to our own hearts, if so be we may better know ourselves and act accordingly.

By adopting a similar line of argument (one which I ought to acknowledge I have borrowed from two striking sermons by C. G. Finney on the "Total

depravity of the human heart"), it may be made plain that not only is there no love to God in the unchanged heart, but that there is also a deep-seated dislike, nay, hatred to Him, to His laws, and to His ways; thus bearing corroborative testimony to the truth of those passages of Scripture which speak of the "carnal mind" as "enmity against God," of the Saviour as being "despised and rejected of men," of the world as hating Him, &c. But it is not so easy to apply the same tests here in anything like so general a manner. When we do not realize that God's will crosses our wills; when we are led to admire His wondrous works; when our hearts are tendered under some gracious visitation from His Holy Spirit as He woos us to love and obey Him; or when God's words by the Psalmist apply to us as they continually do to the ungodly man, "Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself;" there are no emotions of dislike or hatred perceived by us, and we should not admit that they could ever be raised.

But there are seasons when God seems to stand directly across the path in which our unsubdued will is leading us, and we regard Him as a "hard master," as an almighty tyrant, rather than as a loving Father who is doing all for our good, and our proud hearts refuse to bend before Him; then we

cannot altogether plead guiltless of very sinful emotions towards Him. And in how many of those who have habitually disregarded Him, and whose hearts have been hardened by sin, is this hatred very apparent. The instant uneasiness, the contempt, the indignant feelings aroused in their breasts when any allusion to personal religion is made to them; their utter heedlessness of God's law, as his law, and their determined opposition to it; the cruel satisfaction they feel in dwelling on the failings and sins of those who have made themselves prominent as Christ's servants; the eagerness with which they receive and spread any scandal respecting them; these and many other kindred facts cannot satisfactorily be accounted for, except on the admission that "the carnal mind is enmity against God."

But our Saviour and his apostles also speak of the unrenewed man as being *dead* in trespasses and sins. This is a figure not once only, but many times employed by them. And though we are not warranted in implying from this that there is an exact correspondence between a dead body and a soul that is dead to God, yet an expression so striking does unmistakably imply that sin has so utterly ruined man, that he has been brought thereby to a state from which there is no deliverance, for which there is no hope, except in the power of Him who is able

to give life to the dead. All this is the result of sin, the consequence of choosing our own path, of following the imaginations of our own hearts, forsaking the Lord. "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way;" and thus the fearful consequences of our sin must rest upon our own heads, would eternally rest, if it could not be added, "and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all." "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself, but in me is thy help!"

CHAPTER III.

THE WORK OF THE SPIRIT.

SUCH, then, is the picture drawn by the inspired writers, and may I not say, corroborated by facts with which we are all acquainted, of the deep depravity of the unrenewed heart, and a fearfully dark and painful picture it is. We need not now pursue the subject further; enough has, I trust, been said to explain the absolute necessity for that new birth of which our Saviour spoke to Nicodemus. Let us then proceed to the question, How is this to be brought about? Our Saviour's words plainly ascribe it to the power of the Spirit of God. "Except a man be born of water and the spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."

What is meant by these words, "born of water?" It is impossible that they were intended to be understood literally. Nor are we at liberty to alter the words as some appear to do, so as to make them signify, "Except a man be *baptized with* water, &c., he cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven." We

may not, in explaining passages not to be taken literally, substitute ideas so remote from each other as a *being born* and a *being baptized*. And again, even if the ideas were less remote than they are, we have no right so to interpret these words as to make our blessed Saviour thereby shut out the unbaptized from heaven, seeing that for such a doctrine not the slightest warrant is elsewhere to be found in Scripture, and that it is totally at variance with the whole scope of the Gospel dispensation. We must notice, moreover, that it is not two births that Christ is speaking of, one of water and another of the Spirit; it is but one birth of water and the Spirit; a work not performed just at such time and place as it shall please some mere man to perform an outward rite, but the operation of Him who is compared to the wind blowing where *it* listeth. Inasmuch, then, as water was continually used under the Mosaic law as symbolical of that which cleanseth from sin, and as such is occasionally alluded to by the Prophets, are we not justified in believing that here it is combined with the Spirit in this declaration respecting the new birth, as illustrating his work upon the soul, in thoroughly cleansing it from its pollution by sin, and thus making it fit for entrance into the kingdom of God?

Our Saviour makes no further allusion to water;

it is to the work of the Spirit that He draws our attention. Is it irreverent here to inquire, *How* does the Spirit of God accomplish this work so infinitely important to man? A careful examination of the testimony of Scripture respecting Him will show us that He works by means of the truth. "The word of God" is "the sword of the Spirit." He convinces of sin. He points to the Lamb of God. He invites us to come to Christ. He enables us to understand the things of God. He exercises on our minds a power far beyond all that man can exert on his fellow man. But it is for us to hearken to His teaching. It is for us to follow as He leads. The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, as the Spirit against the flesh. We may resist the Spirit of God. We may quench the Spirit. We may cause Him to depart from us. But they who, yielding to his influence, humbly submit to God and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, know what it is to be born again. These have been converted. They have been turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God. They have repented. Eternal life has begun in their souls. The Holy Spirit, who has hitherto graciously visited them, now condescends to make His abode with them. They have received the promise of the Spirit, and are thereby enabled to cry "Abba, Father."

But some may object that this view of the passage from death unto life represents man as taking a part in the great work, it appears as if thus it were not all of grace, as if there was some work whereof man could boast; it seems inconsistent with those portions of Scripture which ascribe all the glory to God. In reply to this objection let me, in the first place, refer to the striking manner in which this work is spoken of in Scripture; sometimes as if it was to be performed by man, sometimes as if it was to be performed by God alone.

Is it spoken of as repentance? Again and again is the sinner called upon to repent, as if all devolved upon himself; on the other hand, Jesus is said to have been exalted to *give* repentance to Israel.

Is it spoken of as faith in the Lord Jesus Christ? How continually is the sinner told to believe in Him for salvation, and yet we are also told, "by grace are ye saved through faith, and that *not of yourselves*, it is the *gift of God*."

Is it spoken of as coming to Christ? "Come unto me ye that labour and are heavy laden." "He that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." Here the sinner is to come; but he is also told, "No man can come unto me except the Father which hath sent me draw him."

Is it the receiving of eternal life? This is spoken

of as God's free gift through Jesus Christ; but He says, "Ye will not come to me that ye might have life."

Is it the receiving of a new heart? This too is said to be the gift of God. "A new heart also will I give you and a new spirit will I put within you." Yet does the Lord by the same prophet say, "Make you a new heart and a new spirit, for why will ye die, O house of Israel?"

So again in the 15th of Luke, when the sinner is compared to the lost sheep, seeing that this did nothing towards being restored to the fold, it might seem to teach that man did but lie passive in the hands of a sovereign God. The same seems, if possible, more strongly taught still in the parable of the lost piece of silver. But when we read of the prodigal's return all seems to depend upon the sinner's own act. And this combining of God's work and man's work, if I may be allowed to use the term, runs through the whole teaching of our Saviour and his apostles. Sometimes one is dwelt upon, sometimes the other, and at times this combining of the two may appear difficult to comprehend; yet if we examine what is God's part and what is man's, we shall see that most certainly all the glory is God's, and that to man belongs nothing but confusion of face.

How does the matter stand? Here is man before the Almighty God his Creator, an undone sinner, bearing a load of guilt that must sink him into hell, and utterly unclean in the sight of Him whose holiness is perfect. But Christ has died for him, and removes of his own free grace that load of guilt which man cannot bear. This is God's doing, and towards the removal of that guilt man does nothing at all, absolutely nothing. His forgiveness is entirely the result of God's infinite love and mercy in Christ Jesus. But the work is not yet complete, the pardon of the criminal has been sealed by the blood of the Lamb, but there is no love to God in his heart, nor any purpose of serving him in his mind. So, by the instrumentality of his servants, *repentance*, as well as remission of sins, is preached among all nations in the name of Jesus. These pray them in Christ's stead to be reconciled to God. And the Holy Spirit accompanies the word spoken with his own power, in order that man may be turned from his enmity, and under his sanctifying influence be made meet for the kingdom of heaven. "And some believe the things which are spoken, and some believe not."

He who believing in God's love, with a contrite heart, turns to him whom he had forsaken and accepts the offered pardon, knows that not only is that pardon a free gift, but that the power by which he turned

was all of the Lord. With himself was the unwillingness to turn, the slowness to believe, the struggle, the fear, the sinful delay. With God was the powerful pleading, the enlightening grace, the tender love, the mighty hand laid upon him, the patient knocking at the door of his heart, the finding him out when he was afar off. If left to himself he well knows that he would have gone on sinning more and more, departing further and further from God ; but, subdued by his Father's love and power, he has turned and believed, and now lives, and eternally will he ascribe all the glory to Him to whom alone it is due.

And he that believes not, but though living under the sound of the Gospel message, still seeks first to please himself, to obtain happiness in following the imaginings of his own heart, and, mistrusting his God, still shrinks from giving up his heart to Him, or pursues a course of wilful disobedience, does *he* know nothing of this power also ? Has there been no conflict, no struggle in his mind ? Has it never been made plain to him that some course he is pursuing is opposed to God's will, and has he not chosen to persist in it ? Has he known nothing of the tender influence of God's love ? Has he never heard anything like the Saviour's own voice, has He knocked at the door of his heart demanding admission there ? Did he not refuse to open it, or put Him off to a more

convenient season? I appeal to his own heart whether more or less it has not been even so. Acting thus he has been resisting the Holy Ghost, and how fearfully has he thereby been adding to his guilt. Oh! who can tell how awfully critical are those periods in a man's life when God in mercy thus visits his soul. Alas! how many at such times tremble like Felix, or are *almost* persuaded like Agrippa, who yet reject the counsel of the Lord, and slight the day of their visitation.

Still some may perhaps ask, "But what am I to do? You tell me that I am a sinner without the love of God in my heart, nay, dead in trespasses and sins, and that I am entirely helpless. You tell me that I must be born again, that a thorough change must take place in my heart; and yet that this is the work of the Holy Spirit, and that it is only by his power that I can be changed. If I pray, my prayer is vain, unless I pray in faith, and yet faith I am told is the gift of God. What must I do? Must I *wait* for the influence of the Spirit?"

Why should such an one wait? Does not the very fact of his heart yearning for deliverance prove that a power higher than his own *is* at work there, though he may be in doubt as to whence it cometh? Let him not care to decide that question; waiting thus he will grieve the Spirit. Let him *believe* and

obey, obey the voice of Him who says, "Come unto me and I will give you rest." Believe in His love, who willesh not that any should perish.

When Nicodemus asked the Saviour a somewhat similar question, when he said to Him, "How can these things be?" observe our Saviour's reply. "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so shall the Son of Man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have eternal life." He withdraws his attention from the agent by which the change was to be effected, and from the means by which it was to be brought about, to fix it upon Himself as the sinner's only hope.

If men sin against each other, and a bitter enmity arises between them, we look to him that has done the wrong to make the first advances towards reconciliation by a candid acknowledgment of his fault. But it is not thus between God and man. The sin, the enmity is all on man's side; yet is it God who seeks for a reconciliation, who makes the first advances towards it, who declares His pardoning love. In the Lord Jesus Christ upon the cross, we see Him drawing all men unto Himself, by that amazing proof of His love as He pleads thereby, "Be ye reconciled to me." Through Him is the Father's love proclaimed to this lost world, through Him is made known the forgiveness of sins, through

Him is eternal life freely offered to every one who *believes* in Him.

Thus we see, and it is a truth that pervades the whole of the New Testament, and it might almost be said, though less distinctly, the Old Testament also, that the first step in the sinner's return is *faith*. Faith in God's love to him through Jesus Christ—a faith which has to do with his commandments, quite as much as with his promises. For if that faith be real, love and obedience always go hand in hand with it, and to him that believeth is promised the gift of the Holy Ghost. He it was who caused him to know that his Father loved him, He brought him to accept pardon through the blood of Christ, He subdued his enmity and led him, perhaps with but a trembling confidence, to open the door of his heart; into that heart He enters; he that was lost is found and becomes a temple of the Holy Ghost; is he not born again?

CHAPTER IV.

THE SIGNS OF LIFE.

I WILL refer to the conversion of the Apostle Paul, as somewhat illustrating what I have been endeavouring in the last few pages to teach. From the miraculous circumstances which attended it, some may consider it an exceptional case; but it will not be difficult to shew that it is but one example out of many of that wonderful diversity of operation which marks the Spirit's work, and that the leading features of the change are in nowise different from what appear in others.

The Lord met Saul in the midst of his determined hostility to Himself and His disciples, and arrested him by convincing him of his sin, inasmuch as he was made clearly to see that Jesus whom he persecuted was both Lord and Christ. This was the truth which in an especial manner it was necessary for him to believe. The power brought to bear upon his mind, in order to convince him of this, was certainly greater than that which God ordinarily

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employs. The risen Saviour himself spoke to him, he saw Him and heard His voice, and under the immediate pressure of these influences, he exclaimed, "Lord what will thou have me to do?" Here was the subjection of his stubborn will. But was no work going forward in his mind during those three days of blindness? May we not suppose that then he passed through a fearful conflict? All the consequences of the change to him, the new life that must certainly be led, the blasting of all the hopes he had been entertaining, the sufferings he must endure, the cross that he must bear, on the one hand; and God's unutterable love in sending His Son into the world, then first made plain to him on the other: all these and many other thoughts intermingled with Satan's cruel suggestions, did they not crowd upon his mind, as he lay at Damascus, neither eating nor drinking? At length, completely subdued, his troubled soul found vent in believing prayer. *Then* was the Lord's messenger sent to him with the words of peace; and, filled with the Holy Ghost, he first experienced that peace and joy of which he has written so largely.

And now, setting aside that which was miraculous, wherein does this differ from other conversions? It is the mode of action which alone is different, and that is diverse as the human mind; the work itself is

the same as with others. As with Saul, so in every other case; the sinner is made to feel that he is a sinner, a helpless, guilty, sinner; as with him so with every one else, I speak of those to whom the gospel has been preached, Jesus, as the sinner's only ground of acceptance, and faith in Him as such, is what the Spirit invariably leads to. As with him so with all others, the will is brought into subjection to the Divine will, and "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do," is not only upon the lips, but the earnest desire of the soul is henceforth to bring the conduct into conformity with that will. As of him so also may it be said of all others, "Behold he prayeth." Henceforth prayer will be the natural breathing of that life which has begun in the soul. More or less as with the apostle, so will there be with all others, sooner or later, peace and joy in believing. And, finally, as with Saul so also with others, the result of the change will be a devoted life; they will no longer live unto themselves, but unto Him who died for them and rose again.

Very different may be the extent to which these characteristics of the new birth are manifested in different individuals, and yet more different may be the character of the previous conflict, if there be any, and the time during which it may last. The previous mode of life, education, natural temperament, and

the kind of religious teaching to which we have been accustomed, all have their effect. But whatever these may be, I have no confidence in any professed conversion in which heartfelt contrition for sin, faith in Jesus as our Redeemer, a subjection of the will, a prayerful spirit, peace and joy in believing, and a subsequent devoted life are not the leading features.

Many thoughts still suggest themselves, but I must draw to a conclusion. Allow me, however, before doing so, to put to each of us the solemn question, "Have I been born again?" and may the Holy Spirit help us to a truthful answer. Yet would I put the question in a different form. We do not need to turn over the pages of our past experience to see if we can fix upon any time when the great change was effected. What we want to know is, "Am I now living to God, or am I yet dead to Him." However vivid may be our recollections of the past, and however conformable such past experience may be with what we learn from Scripture respecting true conversion, still this is nothing at all to trust to if the evidences of present life are wanting. And again, there are not a few who are truly living to God, and who bear abundant witness of it in their daily life and conversation, who yet, from the gentle way in which they have been led, or from the early date of the change, are almost as unable to call

to mind the circumstances of their spiritual birth as of their natural. Sufficient is it for these to know that they are alive. The very fact that they have no distinct point in the past to look back upon exempts them from some temptations to which those are liable whose change was of a more sudden and marked character, and who could, like Saul of Tarsus, point to the day and the hour.

The signs of our natural life are many, and they are very plain; we rarely stand in doubt. If we do, with what anxiety do we feel the pulse, or listen to the breath, or watch for some motion of the limbs. How is it that it is not the same with our spiritual life? Ought not it to be evidently apparent also? Alas! how often as we mingle with the dead, are we afraid or ashamed to shew any symptoms of life, till we so stifle that which yet exists, that we ourselves stand in doubt of it. Were we but half as careful of our spiritual as of our outward life, seeking the daily food, using the healthy exercise, watching against that which might injure, we should not travel on, as many now do, in doubt and darkness and discomfort. How much more also should we prove living witnesses of our Father's love, and how would our marked separation from the spirit and aim and hopes of the world, make it plain to those that are afar off from God, that we possessed a life of

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which they knew nothing. For the prominent features of that life would continue to be the same as those I have already alluded to as marking its commencement, and how alien are these to the spirit of the world. Let me again repeat them. Contrition for sin, and a shrinking from it in every form. Faith and love toward the Lord Jesus Christ, with peace and joy in Him. A subjection of our will to the Divine will. A prayerful spirit. A life devoted not to ourselves but to the Lord. Do we bear these evidences of life? Again let me ask it, Are we alive or are we dead?

LECTURE IV.

OUR SAVIOUR AND THE WOMAN OF
SAMARIA.

CHAPTER I.

THE INTERVIEW.

THERE are few of the narratives of the Bible that are more indelibly engraved on our minds than that which claims our attention this evening. With our mind's eye we see a little company of travellers in the heat of the day walking slowly along a verdant plain. We watch them till, at the extremity of this plain, they reach a narrow valley between two well-defined hills. At the entrance of this valley is a well of water, on which one of the party, wearied with his walk, sits down to rest whilst the others pass on to the town in the beautiful gorge before them. Then we see a woman with her water-pot drawing near to the well, and the two at length engaged in earnest conversation.

But who are they who appear to have thus accidentally met in this interesting spot? Ask the woman as she first approaches the well, and she will tell us; "I am a Samaritan, he is a Jew; I worship on Mount Gerizim above us, he at Jerusalem. My people and his have no dealings with each other, and they will remain at enmity till the Messiah comes to settle the vexed question between us as to where men ought to worship." She little thinks she is drawing near that Messiah whose heart already yearns over her and designs her deliverance from the guilt and pollution which separate her from her God. She little thinks as her eyes rest on that weary One in all His human weakness that "in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." Yet so it is; and they meet there, the Holy One and the impure! And how does *He* meet her? Does He act the part of one who says in his heart, "Stand by, for I am holier than thou?" Does He refuse to have anything to do with her as the whole of her sinful life lies open before Him? So far is He from this that He does not give her, in the first place, the slightest idea that He is anything better than herself. He does not disdain to place Himself in the position of one who might appear to be under obligation to her. He asks her for water to drink.

But when she expresses surprise at this request, as coming to her from a Jew, then He utters words full of deep meaning, not only to her, but to each one of us, and well calculated to arrest her attention; "If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldst have asked of Him, and He would have given thee living water." The gift and the Giver are alike unknown to her; but her curiosity is excited, and she asks, "Whence hast thou that living water." Jesus answers, "Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." Wondering who it can be that talks so strangely with her, and yet so earnestly, she incredulously asks, "Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw." Jesus makes no attempt to explain; He has said enough to make the woman understand that the gift is one of no little value, and, ere long, when she has come to know more of the Giver, she will be able somewhat to understand what now so much surprises and perplexes her.

Wishing to make *Himself* known, He turns the conversation: "Go, call thy husband, and come hither." "I have no husband," she replies. Jesus

answers, "Thou hast well said I have no husband; for thou hast had five husbands; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband: in that saidst thou truly." What an opening of her eyes is this to the poor woman. She is instantly aware that she is standing in the presence of one who is familiar with the whole of her past life, and yet, though that life had been a dark and sinful one, there is nothing in His tones or look to repel her. Her sins are marked before her, yet is she not driven away by the sinless One. Instead of this, she is emboldened to make request to Him, hoping thereby to have her mind set at rest on a question that has long perplexed her. And we must not suppose that it is mere curiosity that prompts her to do this. Her mind is not at rest. She believes that results of the utmost importance to her soul depend upon her offering to God aright the worship that is due to Him. She knows not Him whom she worships, and has been taught to believe that place and time and outward rite are of the utmost importance. So now, in the presence of a "Prophet," she seizes the opportunity of asking Him a question which, to her mind, is almost like asking the way to heaven. "Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." "Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour

cometh when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. Ye worship ye know not what; we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for the Father seeketh such to worship Him. God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth." The woman supposed the answer to her question must be either Mount Gerizim or Jerusalem; and though this reply has come with an authority she has never felt before when listening to the teaching of man, she is disappointed: she remains perplexed, and she looks with longing eyes to that time when Messiah shall come and tell her all things. But what are her feelings as this mysterious stranger assures her, "I that speak unto thee am He."

Jesus has at length revealed Himself to her; and she has believed in Him. The disciples returning at this juncture, in the fulness of her joy she leaves her water-pot by the well to proclaim the glad tidings to her friends and neighbours. The living water and the worship in spirit and in truth are alike forgotten for the time in the one absorbing thought, that she has found the Messiah; she is certain it is He; her perplexed soul rests upon Him; He will in time tell her all things.

How much there is here which is suggestive to the Christian teacher. His great work is to preach Jesus Christ and His unsearchable riches; to make known the Giver and His glorious gifts. It is not to inculcate a system of theology, to confute the doctrinal errors of this man or that man, or to uphold the most correct system of Church government. These things may have some place in his labours, but his main work is that of the Apostle Paul. "I determined," said he, "not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and Him crucified." And again, "Unto me who am less than the least of all saints is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ." This was the course followed by our Saviour; He proclaimed His gifts, and then He revealed Himself. He was able to do this; and we admire the wisdom and the love with which He did it. We need the knowledge ourselves first, and after this the "grace given," before we can profit others; but with both the knowledge and the grace, we too often miss the high yet simple aim which Christ's example here sets before us.

"And this is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent." In perfect harmony with these words are those we have already alluded to. "If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that

saith to thee, Give me to drink, thou wouldst have asked of Him, and He would have given thee living water." And what is this living water? Not such as may be found in vessels of man's making, but fresh, sparkling, running water, as it flows from the everlasting fountains. A little later on, and in another place, we find our Saviour using the same apt simile. "In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink. He that believeth on Me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." And the Evangelist adds, "But this spake He of the Spirit, which they that believe on Him should receive." The living water is then the Holy Spirit, with all the blessings which follow in His train.

Without this gift we are utterly helpless, we cannot understand the things of God, they are foolishness unto us. We know not even what we should pray for as we ought. We have no power to overcome our besetting sins. Unless the Holy Spirit opens our eyes we are blind to our true interest, blind to that which is truly beautiful and glorious, and we grope along in darkness, stumbling at every step. Unless He opens our ears we are deaf to God's commands and disobedient to them. Except He gives us life we are dead in trespasses and sins, and shall

remain dead for ever. But He supplies all our wants in these respects ; having God's Spirit, we have life and light and strength. "He that drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst ; his soul is satisfied. And not only is the soul of the believer himself satisfied, but from within him are to flow rivers of living water which shall cheer and refresh others. For, as the Scripture hath said, "The Lord shall satisfy thy soul in drought, and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not." And again, when He pours His Spirit on all flesh "your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions."

Thus it has ever been, and ever will be. He who by faith becomes a partaker of the Holy Spirit is blessed himself, and becomes more or less a blessing to others. Blessed himself in those rich streams of heavenly consolation which flow into him from the fountain of love. Blessed, inasmuch as he has become a "partaker of the Divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust." Blessed in the heavenly guidance, in the powerful teaching, in the holy light and life which that Spirit gives. Blessed, in that "he is sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, who is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the pur-

chased possession, unto the praise of His glory." All flowing as 'the free gift of God to those that believe in Jesus, to those who, knowing Him, and knowing His gift, ask and receive.

And he is made a blessing to others also. Look at the result of that great outpouring of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, and see how from one to another the living stream flows on, increasing from the little rivulet, till it becomes the great river that cannot be passed over, and whose waters are such that everything liveth whither the river cometh. Oh, what efforts have the powers of darkness made since then to arrest the progress of those living streams. How have they sought to dry them up. How have they tried to pollute and poison them. But they still flow, fresh and pure from the fountain head, and at this present hour are giving life and strength to thousands upon thousands. May we who are drinking therefrom see to it, that if blessed like a watered garden ourselves, we are also like the spring of water whose waters fail not to the thirsty and needy around us.

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CHAPTER II.

THE TRUE WORSHIPPERS.

AFTER speaking of the living water, Jesus abruptly turned the conversation. His reply to the woman's question, as to the place of true worship, amounts to this. Whatever may have been the will of God in days past, as to time, or place, or outward form, in connection with the worship of Himself, the hour is now come when all special requirements as to these things have ceased to be of any consequence. But He expects now, as He has ever done, that those who worship Him should *know* Him, and should worship Him in spirit and in truth.

What is worship? Is it not an act of homage which man pays to God; an act by which he shews his sense of the position in which he stands to his Maker?

The publican worshipped God when, not venturing so much as to lift up his eyes to heaven, he smote upon his breast and said, "God be merciful to me, a sinner." He saw God as holy, as almighty, and yet merciful. He felt himself to be a sinner, having no

hope unless God helped him ; and this led him to cry for mercy.

Solomon worshipped God in the court of his gorgeous temple, when, kneeling down with his hands stretched forth to heaven, he gave expression to those feelings which filled his soul, both as regards himself and the work of his hands. How altogether insignificant was he, and how unworthy was his temple of the presence of Him whom the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain.

Abraham's servant is said to have worshipped the Lord when he saw how he had prospered him in his journey, and had answered his prayer. Under a fresh sense of His loving-kindness, he bowed his head and blessed Him.

Paul and Silas worshipped God, when bound with fetters, and suffering from cruel stripes, they prayed and sang praises to God in the jail at Philippi. They knew themselves to be but sinners saved by grace, entirely dependent on God. They knew Him in all his holy and glorious attributes, as few have known Him besides ; yet did they also know the position in which they stood to Him through his mercy in Christ Jesus, as His own adopted children. Realizing this, their present trials in His service they counted as nothing ; and in the deep sense of His wondrous love, they lifted up their hearts in prayer and praise.

John describes in his vision the four and twenty elders as worshipping God, when they fell down before Him, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, and honour, and power; for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created."

Thus we see that prayer, thanksgiving, and praise are all acts of worship when performed in spirit and in truth; but it is absolutely necessary, in order that such worship should be acceptable, that the worshipper should both know himself and Him whom he worships.

The Pharisee did not know himself when, in a self-righteous spirit, he came before God and thanked Him that he was not as other men. And the Lord's people of old did not know Him, "though they sought Him daily, and delighted to know His ways, as a nation that did righteousness and forsook not the ordinance of their God," when they imagined that "a day for a man to afflict his soul, to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him," was "an acceptable day to the Lord."

But there is something more than this needed. The public worship of the Jews was not complete without a sacrifice. Morning by morning, and evening by evening, as they drew near to God, the lamb

had to be placed on the altar. Two young bullocks and seven lambs had to be sacrificed as part of their worship at the beginning of every month. And year by year, as the solemn feasts came round, the paschal lamb, the scapegoat, the blood sprinkled upon the altar, the incense burnt as the High Priest entered the most holy place, were all necessary parts of their worship on those holy days. Then, too, on these occasions, a special time and place, a priest to offer, and minute exactness in every particular of the ceremony, were all indispensable. But though these things are now all passed away, though the hour has come when the Father is worshipped "neither on this mountain nor yet at Jerusalem," it is because Jesus has come in whom all these sacrifices are fulfilled, not because they had no meaning in them and are therefore set aside as useless. The "one sacrifice for sins" has been made. Jesus, our High Priest, "has entered not into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us." And in Him alone is our worship acceptable. We must present ourselves in His name. There needs a mediator between us and the Holy Lord God. Jesus Christ is He—and there is none but He.

And is not this to some extent included in what

has before been said, that he who worships God aright, must know both God and himself? for, if he has a right sense of his own sinfulness and of God's holiness, he will see his need of such a Saviour as the Lord Jesus Christ. And, knowing God in Him, his worship is no longer one of fear and trembling, and dreadful awe, but there is a holy boldness, a confiding love, a child-like dependence, befitting him who knows himself to be a forgiven sinner and an adopted child.

And worship must be in "spirit and in truth." The daily sacrifice, the ram brought as a trespass offering, the blood sprinkled on the altar, the offering of the turtledove, or two young pigeons, as the Israelites presented their new-born children before the Lord, availed nothing, unless the worship of the heart accompanied the outward ceremony; and how often this was not the case, the frequent denunciations of their prophets testify.

"This people draweth near unto me with their mouths, but their heart is far from me." "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord. I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he-goats. Bring no vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of

assemblies, I cannot away with ; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth ; they are a trouble unto me ; I am weary to bear them." Thus we see, the outward observance, apart from heart worship, was abomination to the Lord, was a solemn mockery, an offence unto Him.

And is there nothing in the worship of those who call themselves Christians, to which equally strong language may be applicable ? I do not want to dwell upon the sacrifice of the mass, the prayers in a dead language, and the gorgeous or puerile accompaniments of Roman Catholic worship, which we as Protestants have abandoned ;* though indeed we must feel that if sacrifices and feasts, and solemn ceremonies of God's own appointing, became, though rigidly observed, hateful to Him, so that he was weary to bear them, because unaccompanied with the sacrifice of a broken and contrite heart ; we must feel, I say, that if these things were an abomination, how much more

* This paragraph was written before the late strange movement in favour of ritualism, and I do not now care to alter it. But it is painfully humiliating to feel how incorrect it is to speak of the abandonment of these things on the part of a very large number who, whilst the word Protestant is offensive to them, consider themselves in their right places outside the Church of Rome.

must those ceremonies be which are *not* of his ordering ; which, instead of pointing to a Saviour, lead away from him, and which with the utmost charity, we cannot but believe are so very often utterly heartless. Neither do I wish to dwell upon what appears to me the awful mockery of some of our cathedral services. I will go a little nearer home. I have said that true, heartfelt prayer, and here I include the offering of thanksgiving and praise, is an act of worship ; but the mere uttering of a form of words, or the uttering of words without a form, when the heart is not feeling what the lips utter, is not worship. It is a kind of insult to God.

It must be so. We all know it is. It matters not how excellent the words may be, or how appropriate to the condition of him who utters them, if they do not proceed from the heart, he who hopes thereby to please God, or to perform some duty required of him, is altogether mistaken ; quite as much so as the Pharisee in the parable. And yet, are not offerings of this kind made to God very frequently, both in our public assemblies and in the privacy of the closet ?

As to what occurs in private, we have none to bear witness against us ; the matter rests between ourselves and our God, and we can each speak for ourselves alone. But unfaithfulness in this direction has very

often been acknowledged, and I doubt not continues to be felt by many. Satan knows of what infinite importance to us our private worship is, and he is ever seeking in one way or the other to intrude himself upon us at such times. Does he not often succeed in robbing us of a blessing by the snares he lays for us? It is well with those whose consciences are tender in this respect, and who, when they have been made aware of the presence of sin in their devotional exercises, are not discouraged from at once confessing it, and from going humbly, yet trustfully, to the fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness. The young disciple needs frequently to have it impressed upon him that a short time, even a very short time, spent in lively heartfelt exercise of mind, is often far more profitable than a longer time when mind or body is weary. We must not expect to please God according to the length of time we devote to waiting upon Him, any more than we should expect to be heard for our much speaking. But is not the chief cause of that worldliness of mind in the worship of the closet, of which so many complain, to be traced to the ascendancy we give to the world and the things of the world throughout the day? If we are not *watching* unto prayer, if we are not setting the Lord always before us; if, during the day, we are habitually acting with but little reference to Him, how can we

expect, all at once, at any time we please, to realize His presence and to find ability to worship Him in spirit and in truth.

As regards our assemblies for public worship, the case is somewhat different. It is not for us to judge between what is offered by another in sincerity of heart and what is not; but there are some occasions in which the want of heart in our worship is so very plain, that the utmost stretch of charity is unable to make us believe or hope that it is otherwise. I am aware I tread here upon delicate ground, and I greatly desire to be preserved from anything of a sectarian bias; and, most truly, the iniquities of our holy things have to be confessed by the Church at large, not by one sect or denomination much more than by another.

The worship of a church must be lively, or otherwise, in proportion to the *life* of that church: if this is at a low ebb, no forms and no absence of forms, no restraints imposed by man or liberties given by him, can make the worship lively or spiritual. On the contrary, if the Church is full of life, a life nourished by the Holy Spirit, and shewing itself in warm love to the Lord Jesus Christ, the worship will be in spirit and truth, whatever the outward circumstances of it. Yet these must not be regarded

as of *no* importance, though we give full force to what has just been stated.

Seeing that we do not even know what we should pray for as we ought, but are entirely dependent on the Holy Spirit to help our infirmities in this as well as other respects ; seeing that it is by His Spirit that God works in His people, both to will and to do of His good pleasure ; those circumstances must be most favourable to lively worship, in which His guidance and assistance is most simply relied upon and followed, and in which there is no restraint placed by human authority on the exercise of those gifts which He dispenses. We must notice these two things : firstly, the submitting of ourselves to be led by the Spirit of God ; and, secondly, the placing of no restraint upon others which might prevent them from simply following where He leads. In the laudable desire of the Church, that all things should be done decently and in order, there has ever been felt a great difficulty in upholding them both. If every member of the Church was a full-grown, perfect Christian, knowing his right place and keeping to it, walking in the Spirit and yielding implicit obedience to the Great Captain, the Church would have no need to exercise any authority in the matter. But this is very far from being the case ; and, as wrong things result, the Church steps in and imposes its

restraints, which too often, whilst checking the evil in one direction, increase it in another.

Thus, as I take it, it has come to pass, perhaps by a very indirect process, that almost universally in our assemblies for worship, one man has the sole direction of the vocal offerings which shall be made. Liberty for others to engage in prayer would, it is supposed, lead to great confusion ; the Spirit's direction, except as regards this one, is virtually set aside, and His influence limited. Whatever care may be taken to the contrary, it sometimes happens that this very man does not know God himself ; and yet, either with words prepared beforehand, or with his own words, he ventures to lead the devotions of the assembly. Are there none of these occasions to which the Lord's words are applicable, "It is iniquity, even the solemn meeting ;"—"My soul loatheth them, I am weary to bear them ?"

But even when this is not the case, many who truly know their Lord and who love His service are limited, that is, the Spirit in them is limited, by their having to use a set form of words, when they bend the knee in public prayer. It is *very far* from me to say that this is always a vain service ; I have not the least hesitation in believing that it is often much otherwise. Still, does not this constant repetition, however appropriate the words may be, almost

necessitate the frequent drawing near with the mouth whilst the heart is far off? and does it not, moreover, very often preclude the offering of other petitions, which would be more adapted to the circumstances of the congregation?

And where there is no limitation of this kind, where a form of words is altogether objected to, but where one individual is expected regularly to spend a certain amount of time in vocal prayer, do no evils again almost necessarily result? Whether his heart is tuned to prayer or not; whether he is made sensible of the wants of his congregation or not, and often without a minute's waiting between a previous exercise and it, he is expected to address his Maker on behalf of those assembled, and for about the same length of time on each occasion, to be as it were their mouth-piece. I appeal to those who habitually attend places of worship, where this state of things exists, as to whether that which may be rightly termed worship in such assemblies, is not often very unsatisfactory.

Then again, I well know that where all these forms are set aside, where the assembly gathers in silence, professing to give itself up to the direction of the Spirit; that silence may be, if anything, a more lifeless form still, than any that have been mentioned. "It is iniquity, even the solemn meeting," may be

equally applicable here also. Unless those who thus assemble know Him whom they come to worship, it must inevitably be so. But where He is known and loved, where the assurance of His presence with the two or three gathered in His name, is believed in and realized, under these circumstances, at least, there are no outward limits set to the operations of the Spirit. The limit too often set here, as well as elsewhere, is that which bound the Saviour, when it was said of Him, "And He could do no mighty work there, and He marvelled at their *unbelief*."

But there is yet something else with regard to which I fear that the denunciation of the prophet is not unfrequently applicable. I refer to the *singing* in our congregations, which is always regarded as *an act of worship*. And I trust the remarks I am about to make on this subject, may be understood as only applying to music or singing *as so regarded*; not as being directed against them in the abstract. Most of the hymns usually sung at such times, contain sentiments and express feelings, which if they came from the heart of those who sing them, would constitute such singing worship in God's sight; and I do not wish to say a syllable to discourage those who can thus sincerely worship God. It does, however, sometimes appear strange, that a whole congregation can at once take any hymn that the

minister may choose ; and, whatever be its character, and whatever be the state of mind of those who are present, all shall sing it as if it expressed their own feelings. Whether it be a hymn of thanksgiving or praise, of confession of sin or of prayer, whether it be one expressing joy, or hope, or fear, or gratitude, or devotion, all who can sing, as a matter of course unite, and call it worshipping the Lord.

It may be said that there ought to be an understanding that only such as can do it sincerely should join, and that others should be silent ; and this might remove some of the difficulties ; but if that were always faithfully carried out, I fear other difficulties would arise, which would greatly disturb the good order of the proceedings. Some would have to be silent on whose leading the congregation depends, and the thoughts of the worshippers would be diverted from their right object.

Then again, how often are the words disregarded, and the thoughts directed to the character of the singing. In order to assist this, instrumental music must be introduced. No one can pretend for a moment to say that the deep tones of the organ constitute worship, any more than the singing of those who, though strangers to religion themselves, are sometimes hired to attend the house of prayer for that purpose. Nor can I understand how such

assistance to the singing can prove any assistance to the sincere and devout worship of our Father in heaven. We need help in this exercise most truly ; but where can it be obtained, except in the power of the Holy Spirit. We want Him to help us to realize the unseen, and in the presence of the Holy One to see ourselves aright. We want Him to glorify Jesus in our midst : this leads to true worship. The music may excite our animal feelings, may bring over us a delightful ecstasy which we may mistake for pure devotion ; but it will not bring us nearer to God, or strengthen us, as all true worship will, to bear the yoke of Christ, and cheerfully take up our daily cross.

I do not, however, wish to judge others, or to speak dogmatically, I only want to commend these thoughts to the serious consideration of my fellow-Christians. Let us now, instead of dwelling any longer on the practices of others, each remember the Saviour's injunction, "What is that to thee ; follow thou me." In reference to the subject now before us, the simple truth, easy to understand, easy to apply to our own particular case, is this : If our worship be dictated by a right sense of the relationship we bear to our Father in heaven, and His Son Jesus Christ, if it be offered in His name, if it be in spirit and in truth, it is but of little consequence under

what circumstances it is offered. But if it be otherwise ; if it be the worship of the lips, whilst the heart is far from God ; if it be dictated by common custom or by an ignorant superstition ; if we care not to know Him before whom we bow, no matter how good our utterances, or how respectable the company associated with us, or how sacred the occasion, it is no worship ; to God's all-penetrating eye, it is a hollow sham.

CHAPTER III.

THE SAMARITANS.

WE will return once more to the narrative. We left the woman with a joyful heart, proclaiming to the men of her city the glad tidings that the Messiah was at their gates. Many received her testimony, believed on Him and besought Him to tarry with them. It would be interesting to know what passed during the two days in which He complied with their request, staying among a people who appear to have received Him as no others had yet done. But the evangelist is silent ; all we are told is that "many more believed because of His own word, and said unto the woman, Now we believe, not because of thy saying : for we have heard Him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world." Here the scene closes ; what became of these simple-hearted believers in the Messiahship of Jesus we are nowhere informed ; but we may conclude that He who began this good work amongst them, would also carry it on in His own time and way to His own glory. And though, when He first sent out His twelve apostles to the lost

sheep of the house of Israel, he forbade them to enter into any city of the Samaritans, yet after his ascension we know that the word of God had free course and was glorified amongst them.

Samaria, only a few miles from Sychar, was the scene of Philip's successful ministry ; and Peter and John, who came to help him afterwards, "preached the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans." The persecution that raged on the death of Stephen, whilst it brought Philip and others to them, appears to have brought trial also to many who believed. But on Saul's conversion, when that persecution ceased, "then," we are told, "had the churches rest throughout all Judæa and Galilee, and *Samaria*, and were edified ; and, walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied." We may be almost certain that there were here and there in these Samaritan churches a few who could tell of the words which Jesus Himself proclaimed to them ; who remembered well those two days when He tarried with them, and dated the commencement of their spiritual life from that period. Now, walking in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, they drank freely of that "living water" of which Jesus spoke, which they had asked for and He had given. And in the reception which they gave to the Jewish believers, and in the great joy caused to all the brethren when

Paul and Barnabas declared to them the conversion of the Gentiles, we see, not only how the Gospel had broken down that wall of partition which separated Jew from Samaritan, but also how these had entirely cast aside those exclusive ideas with regard to worship which had hitherto distinguished them.

But the Samaritans were not all converted. As it has ever been, "some believed the things that were spoken and some believed not;" and the descendants of these have continued their rejection of the Saviour to the present day. Thus the traveller who now visits Palestine may see two most striking testimonies to the truth of the narrative that has this evening claimed our attention. He may still rest by Jacob's well. "Of all the special localities of our Lord's life in Palestine," writes Dean Stanley, "this is almost the only one which is absolutely undisputed. There it is, neglected indeed, and to some extent choked up by the ruins which have fallen into it, but still with every claim to be considered the original well, sunk deep into the rocky ground by the Patriarch Jacob." Then, passing from this spot to the adjoining town of Nabulus, on the site of the ancient Sychar, or Shechem, he may find a small remnant of the ancient Samaritans. "Here," to use the words of the same author, "in their humble synagogue at the foot of the mountain, the Samaritans still worship; the

oldest and the smallest sect in the world ; distinguished by their noble physiognomy and stately appearance from all other branches of the race of Israel. In their prostrations at the elevation of their revered copy of the Pentateuch, they throw themselves on their faces in the direction, not of priest, or law, or any object within the building, but obliquely towards the eastern summit of Mount Gerizim. And up the side of the mountain, and on its long ridge, is to be traced the pathway by which they ascend to the sacred spots, where they alone of all the Jewish race yearly celebrate the Paschal sacrifice."

Poor deluded people, still vainly observing that once sacred rite, ordained to typify a Messiah that has long since come ; still professing to look for His coming. In how many ways do the Jews scattered abroad upon the face of the earth bear testimony to the truth of the sacred page. Reminding us, as again and again they do, that the judgments pronounced upon them under the Old Testament dispensation have been accurately fulfilled ; they do most solemnly warn us not to think lightly of that life and death which are so much more clearly revealed in the New. Thus, also, these few families of poor benighted Samaritans, still inhabiting the precincts of their sacred mountain, still vainly looking for *His* coming who long ago spoke words of peace and love

to their forefathers, are a living warning to us not to reject those solemn lessons which He taught them by Jacob's well.

We may wonder at their blindness and condemn their continued unbelief, still knowing not whom they worship ; but are there none of us who are equally to be wondered at, and more to be condemned ? who, with far more light and immeasurably greater advantages, rest satisfied day after day, and week after week, with a bare routine of religious services, the performance of which we do not like to dispense with, but to which we bring no heart, and in which we have no faith ? Are there none of us who pay our devotions to an unknown God ? How will it be with us when we appear before Him at the last day ? Shall we recognize in the blessed Saviour who sits at the right hand of the throne, one whom in our sojourn here we knew, and loved, and adored ; one whom we trusted in as our Friend and followed as our Guide ; one who spoke peace to our sin-burdened souls, and whom we were not ashamed to confess before men ? Will He acknowledge us ? Do we venture to believe that, having borne our sins in His own body on the cross, He will present us faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy ?

Or, will it be far otherwise ? Will *all* be strange to us on that solemn day ? Shall we see a God

whom we had not known or cared to know? A Saviour whom we had lightly esteemed, and whom we had been ashamed to own; whose offers of mercy and whose solemn warnings we had alike neglected? Shall we hear Him in terrible majesty utter those awful, irrevocable words, "I never knew you; depart from me all ye workers of iniquity?"

God grant that it may not be so; rather may these words be applicable to each of us,—

There no stranger God shall meet thee,
Stranger thou in courts above;
He who to His rest shall greet thee,
Greets thee with a *well-known* love.

LECTURE V.

CHRIST REJECTED AT NAZARETH.

CHAPTER I.

THE SYNAGOGUE.

ON our Lord's first visit to Jerusalem, notwithstanding His treatment of the traders in the temple, no open opposition appears to have been made to Him. Nicodemus was conscious that the Scribes and Pharisees watched Him with jealous feelings, and therefore he sought an interview with Him in the darkness of the night: and when Jesus Himself knew that they had heard that He made and baptised more disciples than John, He left Judæa and returned into Galilee: but hitherto we meet with little further indication of that bitter hostility which gradually manifested itself against Him, and which at last brought Him to the cross.

Jesus was, moreover, favourably received on His

return to Galilee. "The Galileans received Him," writes the apostle John; "having seen the things which He did at Jerusalem at the feast." And as He passed from town to town, teaching in their synagogues, "He was glorified of all." But at Nazareth, the home of His childhood; and by those who had been more or less acquainted with Him for years, He was otherwise received. Our attention this evening will be directed to the circumstances which led to His first public rejection.

As, however, the services of the synagogue, of which we find so much mention in the New Testament, are in this narrative very prominently brought forward, it may not be inappropriate in the first place to make a few remarks respecting these places of worship and teaching.

Though Jewish writers claim for this institution very great antiquity, leading us as far back as to the patriarch Jacob himself, it is clear from incidents recorded in the reigns of Jehoshaphat and Josiah, that up to their time there was no such regular provision made for the frequent reading of the law of Moses as the synagogue afterwards furnished. The temple, with the ark, the mercy-seat, the brazen altar, &c., was the one place of worship to which the ceremonial law had reference. But this was ordinarily only accessible to a very few; so the high places and the

green trees in their several localities were the resort of thousands who rarely entered the temple. These places, though at times devoted to the worship of Jehovah, were, however, more frequently the scenes of idolatrous rites, and the later prophets invariably forbad their use.

Josephus makes no mention of synagogues till the year 170 B.C., in the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes ; but there is good reason to suppose that by that time they had become general ; their origin being usually traced to the peculiar circumstances under which the Jews were placed, during, and immediately succeeding, the Babylonish captivity. When the fierce struggle, in which the Maccabees were so prominently engaged with the prince just mentioned, was over, synagogues increased very rapidly, till, in the time of our Saviour, they were found not only in all the towns and most of the villages of Palestine, but also in a great many of the cities of Syria, Asia Minor, and Greece. The larger cities had several. Saul asked for letters to the synagogues of Damascus, and it is evident from the narrative of Stephen that there were many at Jerusalem. The Rabbinical writers affirm that there were several hundreds there.

The internal arrangements of the synagogue, though exceedingly simple, and without the rich

adornments of the temple or the tabernacle, were somewhat after their type. A raised platform, with a desk for the reader, divided the room into two rather unequal portions. Behind it, at the upper end, stood the chest with the sacred rolls; before it, the space occupied by the worshippers; whilst the "chief seats," facing the larger portion of the audience, so coveted by the Scribes and Pharisees, were either on a line with the desk or somewhat behind it. A lamp with several branches standing at the upper end, and a screen before the sacred chest, found in many synagogues, formed some faint resemblance to the golden candlestick and the veil of the temple.

There has been much controversy respecting the functions and relative position of the several officers of the synagogue. In small places there seems to have been often but one presiding rabbi. In larger towns the ruling power appears to have been vested in a college of Elders, called also the "Heads of the Synagogue." One of these, under the title of "the Chief Ruler," appears to have maintained a position above the rest. On another of them devolved the work of providing for the services of each Sabbath-day. It was not necessarily his place to read, but no one was able to do so without his permission. Besides the Elders was one, probably inferior to

them, spoken of as the "minister" or deacon in the passage before us, whose business it was to open the doors, get the building ready for service, take charge of the sacred rolls, &c. These officers appear to have been as a rule, if not invariably, *unpaid*, and to have been chosen from those whose circumstances did not preclude the fulfilment of their duties.

The services were simple in their character. Forms of prayer appear to have been generally used, though not without occasional protest on the part of those who thought that prayer should be offered as the heart prompted rather than according to a form. After prayer had been offered, came the reading of the law, which was so portioned out that the whole might be read within a given period; generally once in the year. After the law portions of the Prophets and the Psalms were also read; but much more liberty seems to have been allowed in regard to these: both the amount read and the portion chosen depending more upon the inclination of the reader. Those whom the presiding Elder called upon to read appear also to have been allowed to give such explanations and comments as they desired.

These were often of a very lifeless and unprofitable character, consisting mainly of far-fetched allegories; fanciful obscure meanings supposed to be found in the individual words of a text, or indeed in the

individual letters of a word ; together with the most puerile directions which descended to the minutest particulars of domestic life. To these were added legends of their early heroes and other fabulous stories. Not that such was always the character of these services. Earnest-minded men were surely sometimes found whose words had a deeper and holier influence. But how often we find the teaching of our Saviour contrasted with that with which his hearers were familiar. "He taught them as one having authority, and not as the Scribes."

With all the failings which we suppose to attach to the services of the synagogue, there can be no doubt that this systematic instruction in the sacred writings, and these, at the very least, weekly gatherings of the more seriously disposed Jews, had a very powerful influence both on their own nation and on the Church of Christ in its infancy.

It was probably in great measure by this means that the Jewish nation was preserved from relapsing into idolatry after the Babylonish captivity. Again, the religious associations of the Jews became much more connected with the synagogue than with the temple. This must have been especially the case with those who resided at a great distance from Jerusalem. The tendency of this was to lessen and almost destroy the authority of the regular priest-

hood. No sons of Aaron were required for these services. No tribe or family, no distinction of birth, was necessary in the officers of the synagogue. Nothing beyond a complimentary precedence was given to the leading men in each. Perhaps this in some measure served to prepare the believing Jews for that state of things in which the greatest amongst them was to be the least of all, and the servant of all: that state in which they were not to call one another, Rabbi, Rabbi, for one was to be their Master, even Christ, and all they were to be brethren.

It has also been supposed that the simple devotions of the synagogue proved more attractive to the heathen proselytes than the temple worship. At least there was nothing in the former to repel them, whilst the reputed holiness of the latter prevented their ever entering its precincts until by circumcision and other rites they had placed themselves under the yoke of the whole Mosaic Law.

But if the synagogue had its influence on the Jewish nation, in somewhat preparing it for those changes which the advent of the Messiah was to introduce; and if, for a short period, it was of great service to our Saviour and the first disciples, in affording them a ready means of communication with those of their own nation in all the towns where they

resided, thus assisting greatly in the first establishment of Christianity: its subsequent effect upon the Christian Church was, if anything, more powerful still. E. H. Pluntree, Professor of Divinity in King's College, London,—whose interesting article on the synagogue, in "Smith's Biblical Dictionary," has furnished me with much I have already said,—remarks, "It would hardly be an exaggeration to say that the worship of the Church was *identical* with that of the synagogue, modified by the new truths, by the new institution of the Supper of Our Lord, and by the spiritual Charismata." It would be quite foreign to the object of my present paper to pursue this subject further into the very interesting field of inquiry which such a statement opens out. I must, however, make one remark:—

If, as we have seen, the synagogue was not established on the authority of Moses or some Divinely inspired prophet, but was the result of altered circumstances, and arose from the peculiar necessities which these imposed; if, moreover, an institution with no higher origin, was not only of great service to the Jewish nation before Christ came, but, made use of by Him and His apostles, became the type after which the various congregations of the early Christians formed, arranged, and governed themselves; so that even to the present day the impress

of the synagogue may be seen somewhere or other on nearly all our Church organizations ; if this be so, I say, should it not lead us to inquire whether, in the marked absence of any special directions on the subject, it is incumbent upon us in these matters to take the practice of the early churches as our pattern. Does it not rather point to the fact that *there is no divinely authorized form of church government*, but that each assembly of faithful Christians is at liberty, seeking wisdom from above, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to adapt its arrangements to its own needs, and to the varied circumstances under which from time to time it may be placed. If the Church had much earlier arrived at such a conclusion, how much of worse than useless controversy would have been spared ! Instead of each section endeavouring to prove the accordance of its system with that of the churches in apostolic days, and that therefore itself was right and all others wrong, there would have been more of the feeling that, though differing in practice, one form might perhaps be equally serviceable in the enlargement and edification of Christ's kingdom with another. And all of us, conscious as we must be of imperfections of one kind or other in our several arrangements, instead of feeling bound to adhere to some stereotyped form, would have been more willing to listen to and learn from

the experience of others in our efforts at amendment.

It is time that we turned to the narrative before us. Jesus is making a circuit of the cities of Galilee. He comes to Nazareth. As His *custom* is, He enters the synagogue on the Sabbath-day. He sits down with the rest; the first services have been gone through, the prayers have been offered, the portion from the law has been read. He has perhaps expressed His wish to address the assembly, or, as being a teacher now attracting much attention, He has been invited to take part in the reading. The lesson from the Prophets is given to Him; He unfolds the sacred roll and stands up to read. Whether He reads the portion assigned to Him or not is of little consequence; to Him it was no matter of chance. He reads but a few words from the prophet Isaiah, and these have special reference to Himself. Then He closes the roll, hands it to him who has charge of it, and sits down again. He is no stranger there, though this may be the first time He has publicly spoken in their synagogue, and the eyes of all are fastened on Him. Then He speaks; and as He tells them that this day is this scripture fulfilled in their ears, there fall from His lips words so full of love that all bear Him witness, and wonder at the gracious words which proceed out of His mouth.

It is not for us to know what these words were, but the subject of them we may safely dwell upon for a little while. Not one of the offices in which our Saviour on this occasion revealed Himself should be lightly passed over by us. Jesus, the preacher of glad tidings to the poor. Jesus, the healer of the broken-hearted. Jesus, the giver of sight to the blind. What thoughts of His love, and skill, and tender dealing with us are here suggested! At the present time, however, we will leave these thoughts to consider the other office which He here takes to Himself, that of the Deliverer of the captive.

CHAPTER II.

"THE LORD'S FREEMAN."

IGNORANCE of his true condition presents one of the most formidable obstacles to the sinner's reception of the Gospel. He does not admit that he is in that state of destitution for which the Gospel provides a remedy. He does not believe himself to be so poor and helpless as to stand in urgent need of that Almighty Friend who is there presented to him. As to his being blind, his indignation rises at such a supposition at once. But perhaps no statement of Scripture regarding himself does he more generally and more honestly disavow than the fact of his being in bondage. Instead of thus regarding himself, he looks with pity upon the decided follower of Christ, wondering how he can endure the intolerable yoke under which he supposes him to labour.

Our sense of liberty greatly consists in our being free to act as our hearts desire. He, who, thinking of little but the present moment, can do what he likes, does not regard himself as in bonds. If his

heart is set upon worldly pleasures, he may, when circumstances hinder his enjoyment of them, feel himself unfortunate, but he will not be sensible of bondage. On the contrary, when he sees others restrained from sinful enjoyments by the fear of offending God, the idea of a painful bondage is immediately presented to him. But let conscience in some solemn hour assert its supremacy, let it show him the vanity of his frivolous pursuits, or the evil consequences of his sinful indulgences, or bring before his mind the dread tribunal of an offended God ; if under these influences the desires of his heart are altered, is there no sense of bondage then ? Can he do as he would like ? How there meets him at every step he would take the wretched feeling of being unable to do otherwise than he has done. How often has there been wrung from such the candid avowal of a most cruel and hopeless bondage in such words as " It is no use." " There is no hope ; I have loved strangers, and after them will I go." " I *cannot* alter." " I *cannot* repent." The giddy thoughtless youth has no sense of bondage ; but when the law of God, with its awful sanctions, is heard in his soul, then comes the cry, " The good that I would I do not : the evil that I would not that I do." " O, wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me ? " Well is it for him if he go at once to Him who is the

deliverer of the captive, who will enable him to say, "I thank God through Jesus Christ my Lord."

But it is not only in the indulgence of sinful pleasures that the chains of Satan are concealed. In this they are often quickly exposed to view. Loss of means, loss of reputation, loss of health, without any higher influence, often early awake the captive to the fact that he is such. The bonds of the drunkard, the gambler, and the sensualist, are familiar to all. But those bonds are not stronger or more real than are those of multitudes of others, whose lives of outward respectability, whose apparent independence of character, or whose pride of heart, would, if addressed by the Saviour, "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free," lead them to exclaim with the Jews, "We were never in bondage to any man ;—how sayest thou ye shall be made free?" The love of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, vain-glorious desires, pride and unbelief ; these things keep the soul bound to the earth ; they chain the eyes to it so that the glories of the world above are unperceived ; they hinder the spirit from soaring on the wings of prayer or praise ; they render it impossible for the worldly-minded to engage in many occupations, easy and full of blessing to the humble Christian.

The testimony of Scripture to the fact that the

unconverted are in a state of bondage is very full, but our ideas respecting it have much reference to another world. Suppose there were no hereafter ; or, being one, that Christ's disciples and those for whom Christ's service has no charms have an equal chance of happiness in that hereafter ; on either of these suppositions there is no reality in the liberty of the Christian. But accept Christ's simple, though awful testimony with regard to a future state, and who does not at once perceive that he whom sin prevents having a well-grounded hope of immortality, whatever his present enjoyments, must be in fearful bondage—perhaps the more fearful the greater the present ease—and that he is enjoying a glorious liberty, whatever his present suffering, whom nothing can hinder from ultimately entering one of those many mansions which the Saviour has prepared for his people ? We cannot therefore leave out the future in estimating the Christian's liberty, yet we must not regard it as having little or no reference to the present. There is in it a *present* deliverance from the power of sin, or it is an empty name. A hope full of immortality gives a *present* freedom from fear ; and true love to God takes away all sense of bondage in His service.

When that love has taken possession of the heart the world loses its charms ; its sinful pleasures are

abhorred. Jesus has his right place there, and to do His will is our delight. Those things which, done without love, in an unwilling obedience to law, would have been regarded as a painful thralldom, have become a joyful service. The Spirit of the Lord is there, and "where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty." Our sense of present freedom, I have said, consists very much in our being able to do as we like. And when we love God—when Christ is precious to us—when we like His perfect law and His holy ways, and His Spirit within us gives us strength, we can do as we like, and our souls rejoice in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free. As Cowper most truly says—

He is the freeman whom the truth makes free,
And all are slaves besides. There's not a chain
That hellish foes, confederate for his harm,
Can wind around him, but he casts it off
With as much ease as Samson his green withes.
He looks abroad into the varied field
Of nature, and though poor, perhaps, compared
With those whose mansions glitter in his sight,
Calls the delightful scenery all his own.
His are the mountains, and the valleys his,
And the resplendent rivers; his to enjoy
With a propriety which none can feel,
But who, with filial confidence inspired,

Can lift to Heaven an unpresumptuous eye,
And smiling say,—“ My Father made them all.”

* * * * *

He is indeed a freeman. Free by birth
Of no mean city ; planned or ere the hills
Were built, the fountains opened, or the sea,
With all its roaring multitude of waves.
His freedom is the same in every state ;
And no condition of this changeful life,
So manifold in cares, whose every day
Brings its own evil with it, makes it less :
For he has wings, that neither sickness, pain,
Nor penury, can cripple or confine.
No nook so narrow but he spreads them there
With ease, and is at large. The oppressor holds
His body bound, but knows not what a range
His spirit takes, unconscious of a chain ;
And that to bind him is a vain attempt,
Whom God delights in, and in whom He dwells.

But do I say that this liberty is felt to be perfect from the day when it is first tasted ; and that every changed heart at once knows all its fetters to be broken ? Not so. Whilst our faith and our love are imperfect, so will our sense of freedom be ; but that freedom and our ability to rejoice therein will be greatly in proportion to the depth of our love and the strength of our faith.

Nor do I say that the freedom of the Christian is one which has no restraint put upon it. Nothing of

the kind. It is the freedom of a child in his father's house. "Ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father." If we are unable to rest in God's forgiving love, and in filial confidence to call Him Father; if we dare not claim the privileges of sonship; it is quite impossible for us to feel free,—a spirit of bondage and of fear has possession of us. But if we have been delivered from this spirit, and have been able to feel the full force of, and apply to ourselves the words, "Ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus," whilst rejoicing in this freedom we shall feel most strongly that love to our Father imposes upon us the restraint of doing nothing contrary to His will. Without love to Him, and without realizing His forgiving love to us, this restraint would prove a grievous yoke; but love has made it easy, nay, pleasant, and Calvary has robbed it of all but a holy filial fear.

And we soon become sensible of another restraint. As in the family circle, the loving children are not only careful to please their parents, but also to please one another; and as this last obligation often imposes upon them the denial of self and mutual forbearance, so must it be in the Church of Christ. He who loves God must love his brother also. If

Christ pleased not Himself, they that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please themselves. If Christ laid down His life for us, we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. If I am not mistaken, however, there is in this latter obligation more of what is felt to be irksome, more of what approaches to bondage, than in the former. We may often deeply feel the great imperfection of our services to our Saviour; but we know that He accepts the willing heart, and looks with a pitying eye upon our weakness; and we can appeal to Him without the slightest fear that He has misunderstood us.

It is not thus with our brethren. Here is equal imperfection in our service, but there is imperfection also in those we seek to serve. The willing heart may not be perceived in the faultiness of the effort to please, and what has been done with the best of intentions may be altogether misunderstood. Besides, there is sometimes no little perplexity in knowing how to avoid either casting a stumbling-block in the way of a weak brother on the one hand, or of improperly sacrificing our own liberty, and indirectly that of others also, to what appears to us his unenlightened conscience on the other.

These considerations are sometimes allowed so much to prevail with us as to make us live sadly too

much to ourselves. Discouraged by the imperfections of it, we gradually lose our hold of the family relationship, and thus miss many of the blessings connected with it. This should not be; whilst rejoicing in our own freedom, we must act upon the apostle's words, "Brethren, ye have been called to liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another." Yes, *by love*; for here, as in our service to God, love destroys all sense of bondage. Paul had no sense of bondage when he said, "And I will very gladly spend and be spent for you, though the more abundantly I love you the less I be loved. Services rendered to our brethren, however they may be misunderstood or unappreciated here, and even, as is so often the case, though there may be a want of wisdom in the performance of them, are, if they originate in true love to the brethren, regarded by our Saviour as done unto Himself.

Before I leave this subject there is one point I must yet urge. Are we not all conscious of the fact that many who profess to follow Christ have every appearance of being yet in a state of bondage? Some in bondage to sin or sinful habits, some in bondage to the law. And are we not also certain that, though in different ways, both of these classes bear false witness of Christ as the deliverer of the captive?

We may go a step further. Are we not each of us more or less conscious that this bearing of false witness may be laid to our own doors? To what extent has Christ delivered us from the power of sin? Is there any sinful habit, anything that separates between us and God, to which we are yet enslaved? Has faith given us the victory over the world, so that its gains, its ease, its smiles, and its frowns have lost their power to stay our progress heavenward? And, again, to what extent do we, as the children of God, *enjoy* a glorious liberty? Do we in holy confidence call God Father? Do we trust Him as such, casting our care upon Him? Do we obey Him, whatever His requirements, with cheerfulness and gladness of heart? Or have we suffered our downcast looks, and our gloomy countenances, our dulness and heartlessness, the formality of our religious observances, and our studied silence in reference to Him who should be the spring of all our joys, greatly to strengthen the confident belief of the thoughtless and giddy that the disciple of Christ is labouring under a hard master? It is a solemn thing to be found false witnesses. May we afresh look to Him who was anointed to preach deliverance to the captive, to break *all* our bonds.

CHAPTER III.

THE REJECTION.

WE left our Lord uttering such gracious words that all wondered ; but different feelings soon arose, and as He proceeded thoughts like these filled the minds of his hearers. "Is not this the carpenter's son? What authority has He to speak thus? Wherein is He so much better than we are? How can *He* help us in the way He speaks of? We do not need *His* help. Physician heal thyself." They had heard of miracles wrought at Capernaum, and Jesus perceived their desire to see similar works performed in their presence. This does not seem to have been openly expressed, and His instant reply to their *unexpressed* murmurs ought to have awakened them to the consciousness that He who addressed them was, to say the least, a prophet of the Lord. But, instead of this effect being produced, and a sense of His authority being thereby brought over them, the way in which He replied exasperated them to the utmost.

“Many widows,” said He, “were in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land; but unto none of them was Elijah sent save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow. And many lepers were in Israel in the days of Elisha the prophet; and none of them were cleansed saving Naaman the Syrian.” Did they dislike the reproof thus given to that brazen-frontedness of theirs which demanded a miracle to be performed before their own eyes ere they would believe, as if God were to be expected to work a miracle when *they pleased*? Or did their hearts rise in rebellion at this declaration of their dependence on God’s sovereign grace, so like His words to Moses, “I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will show mercy on whom I will show mercy?” Or, which probably would arouse them the most, did they see in this reply a plain intimation that as in those bygone days they were gentiles, not true Israelites, who had been the recipients of these mercies, so it might be in their days? Whatever it was, their anger now reached such a height that they all rose up, and thrust Him out of their city, and led Him to the brow of the hill at the foot of which it was built, that they might cast him down headlong. He allowed Himself to be dragged out of the syna-

gogue, to be thrust out of their city, to be brought to the brow of the hill, and then in a way they little expected, as if to convince them that He was indeed one having authority, He quietly passed through the midst of them, and went His way unmolested back to Capernaum.

They rejected their Saviour; they made light of the glad tidings He had preached to them; they thought they saw clearly enough without His opening their eyes; they knew not that they were captives; or, if they did, they had no faith in His power to deliver them. And this rejection by the people of Nazareth seems to have been maintained throughout the few years of our Lord's ministry. He appears to have visited the town very rarely afterwards. We are not sure that He ever did; but if the visits mentioned in Matthew and Mark were paid on different occasions, it is evident that the same spirit influenced the inhabitants. "They were offended in Him." "He could there do no mighty work, save that He laid His hand on a few sick folk and healed them. And He marvelled because of their unbelief."

There are a few points in this act of the Nazarenes which it behoves us in the present day to pay close attention to. We cannot fail to notice the point at which our Lord is represented as closing the book when He read from Isaiah. Why did He not, after

proclaiming that He was anointed to preach the acceptable year of the Lord, go on to the next words, "and the day of vengeance of our God?" Must we not attribute this to design? There are times to speak of mercy, and there are times to speak of judgment, and this seems to have been an occasion on which mercy was to be the theme, and so His words were all "gracious." God's judgments on the impenitent, the separation of the sheep from the goats, the day of vengeance of our God, allusions to the "terrors of the Lord" appear to have been for a time kept back, that nothing might hinder His hearers from obtaining a glimpse of the riches of His love, and the fulness of His grace. And yet they rejected Him.

There are those in the present day who might seem to think that ministry should *always* be of this character; that if God's love, and faithfulness, and truth, and fatherly kindness, were more the subjects of our teaching, there needs little else to be proclaimed in order to win the world to goodness. This was not our Saviour's experience. I cannot doubt but that much harm has been done, and that many hard thoughts of God, and most unjust ones, have been encouraged by the awful way in which the consequences of sin in a future life have been depicted by many. I feel sure that on not a few the effect of this

kind of teaching has been, not to drive to the Saviour, but to harden in unbelief. Still I believe the consequences would be yet more to be deplored if it should ever be common among Christian teachers so to hush up the fearful reality of what it is to lose the soul, that our hearers should be led to conclude that in the world to come, those who love God, and those who love Him not; those who believe in Christ, and those who neglect Him; those who are born again, and those who despise their birthright, may equally hope to enjoy the pure happiness of God's eternal favour.

There are on this subject mysteries which in this life we cannot fathom, which probably our finite minds, with their utter ignorance of what takes place beyond their own sphere, could not possibly comprehend, however they might be explained to us. If it be so, it is our place to wait patiently; confidently maintaining that the Lord is righteous in all His ways, and holy in all His works; till that hereafter comes, when what we know not now shall be fully known.

Meanwhile, seeing that we literally know nothing of a future world beyond that which is revealed to us in the pages of the New Testament, what right have we, whilst accepting to its full the bright side of what is there revealed, systematically to hide from the

sinner that fearfully dark side, a view of which is unmistakably opened out to us in the same pages. It may be often our place, as it seems to have been that of our Saviour on the present occasion, to speak only of grace, and truth, and love ; but we must not lose sight of the fact that this was far from being common with Him. If we examine the parables we shall find few that have no relation, either directly or indirectly, to a day of reckoning and righteous retribution ; and if any one will take the trouble to set down all our Saviour's own words respecting the way that leads to destruction, the losing of the soul, the perishing of the impenitent, the undying worm, the impossibility of being with Him to those who die in their sins, and, generally, the portion of those who are condemned at the day of judgment, he will be convinced that there was no holding back of these things on His part, and that, if He is to be believed at all, there is such a thing as the losing of the soul as well as its eternal salvation.

How little the Nazarenes knew what they were doing when they thrust Jesus out of their city ; so those who somewhat later besought Him to depart out of their coasts little thought what they thereby lost ; so also, those who cried out Crucify Him, crucify Him, "knew not what they did." And yet the fact of this ignorance did not save them from

the sad consequences of their deliberate rejection of Him. Those of Nazareth listened to His gracious words, and if they were not sure of His authority to utter them, at least they had heard enough and seen enough to have led them to enquire further before they thrust Him out. And had they rightly asked, and in sincerity sought, they would have received and found; they would never have a right to complain that the amount of light granted to them ought to have been so great as to have rendered it impossible for them to have withstood its power. This is not ordinarily the way in which God deals with us. He does not usually, whatever may be thought of some special cases, so flood the soul with light and power as to make it impossible for us to do otherwise than refuse the evil and choose the good.

¶ The first dawnings of Divine light upon the soul bring with them a fearful responsibility. If they lead us to seek for more light, to strive, and wrestle, and pray, more and more light and strength will be given to us, till at length the Sun of righteousness in His full glory shall dispel all our darkness. But if, resolutely or lazily, we shut our eyes to the first glimmerings of light which are granted to us, we have no right to expect its increase; and if it be persistently refused we shall sink at last into the blackness of darkness for ever. Then it will matter

little to us whether we thrust Christ out of our city, or politely besought Him to depart out of our coasts; whether we replied to His loving invitation, "I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it;" or whether, in our angry rejection of Him, we cried out, Crucify Him, crucify Him.

We are not told what were our Lord's feelings as He turned His back upon Nazareth, but we do know what they were when they nailed Him to the cross. "Father, forgive them," He cried, "for they know not what they do." And may we not safely suppose that with somewhat similar feelings He walked sorrowfully to Capernaum? No special judgments came upon the sinful city. It was not "the day of vengeance of our God," but of His mercy, and long-suffering, and forbearing love. What it was to them it is still to us; and if this evening any of us have been made sensible of the Saviour's presence, causing our hearts to yearn after a more glorious liberty than we have yet known; or, under a fresh sense of the solemn realities of the world to come, raising earnest desires that our lives were more in accordance therewith; if thus, or in any wise, our Saviour has been heard this evening knocking at the door of our hearts, let us take heed that it be not in vain.

Our human feelings are touched as we think of our Lord turning back rejected and insulted from the

home of his childhood. Then we know that He felt as a man, and we fancy we can somewhat understand the character of His feelings, and sympathize with Him. But oh ! that sympathy is purely sentimental and utterly hollow, if we can allow Him time after time to visit us in His love, and plead with us, "My son, give me thine heart," and yet let Him plead in vain.

"Behold, I stand at the door, and knock : if any man hear My voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me."

LECTURE VI.

THE MIRACULOUS DRAUGHT OF FISHES.

CHAPTER I.

THE MIRACLE.

It is not easy to say with precision when the miracle took place which now claims our attention. Neander places it before the Marriage Feast in Cana; Archbishop Trench, on the other hand, soon after that visit to Jerusalem in which our Lord met with Nicodemus, and on His return from which He rested by Jacob's well. This seems to me to present the fewest difficulties. Both agree in regarding the account given by Matthew and Mark of the calling of Andrew and his companions as referring to the same event.

Putting these accounts side by side, we meet with our Lord walking by the Sea of Galilee, not attended, as was commonly the case afterwards, by disciples

who had undertaken to follow Him wherever He went; but by multitudes who pressed upon Him to hear the word of God. He had already met with Andrew and Simon, and very probably with James and John; for we are almost compelled to consider the latter as one of those disciples who were with Him at Jerusalem when He talked with Nicodemus; and one of those, also, who on His return to Galilee went to the town to obtain meat for Him, whilst He rested by the well and talked with the Samaritan woman.

We need not be surprised that these should appear for the time to have left their Master to follow their usual occupation; nor does this imply any falling-off in their attachment to Him. They had not yet been called to give up all for Him, and might readily suppose that, though acknowledging Him as the Messiah, they must continue to be dependent on their fishing for a livelihood. It is not improbable that the miracle they this day witnessed, shewing them, as it did, how easily Jesus could in a time of need provide for them, helped them afterwards "straightway to leave all and follow Him."

When Jesus met with Simon and his three companions they were mending their nets after a night of fruitless toil. He entered into Simon's boat, and, after asking him to thrust out a little from the land,

sat down and taught the people. When He had finished He said to Simon, "Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught." Simon replied, "Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing; nevertheless, at thy word I will let down the net." These are plainly the words of one who was already acquainted with the "Master." There was a *little* faith and a ready obedience; and the result was such a multitude of fishes, that when they beckoned to their partners, who seem all the while to have been engaged with their nets, to come and help them, it appeared as if both vessels would have sunk. The immediate effect of this upon Peter is so beautifully described by Archbishop Trench, in his "Notes on the Miracles," that I cannot do better than give his own words.

"When the nets with their contents were at length hauled into the ships, it seemed as if both would sink with their burdens. It was a moment of fear, though not chiefly, or indeed at all, upon this account; but rather because Peter and his companions had now, through this sign, become aware of something in the Lord which they had not recognized before, a higher presence, which filled them with this astonishment and fear. And Peter, who whilst taking others has been himself taken, who whilst drawing the multitude of fishes into his net, has himself fallen into the net of Christ, the same man that he ever afterwards appears, as impetuous, yielding as freely to the

impulse of the moment, with the beginnings of the same quick spiritual eye which made him the first to see the highest glory of the Saviour, even His eternal Sonship, and to confess it, could no longer, in the deep feeling of his own unholiness, endure the nearness of an altogether Holy One, 'but fell down at Jesus' knees, crying, Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.' At moments like these, all that is merely conventional is swept away, and the deep heart of man speaks out, and the deepest things that are in that heart come forth to the light. And this is the deepest thing that is in man's heart under the law, the sense of the gulf of separation that is between him and God. 'Let not God speak with us lest we die;' this was the voice of the people to Moses, as 'they removed and stood afar off.' Below this is the utterly profane state, in which there is no contrast, no contradiction felt between the holy and the unholy, between God and man. Above it is the state, which is that of grace, in which all the contradiction is felt, the deep gulf perceived, which divides between sinful man and an holy God; yet is it felt at the same time that this gulf is bridged over, that it is possible for the two to meet, that in One who is sharer with both they have already been brought together. Into this higher state Christ now invites Peter, not taking him at His word, nor departing from him as He desired, but bidding him to lay aside his fears, and to accept a function and a work from Him. For though His was indeed the presence of God, yet of God with His glory veiled and hidden, so that even sinful men might endure to be near it; and, dwelling in that nearness, might step by step be prepared for the

ultimate seeing of God as He is ; which though it must be death to the mere sinner, yet would be the highest blessedness to him who had been trained and fitted for it, by beholding for a while this mitigated splendour in the person of the Incarnate Word, even such a beholding as would more and more have transformed him into the likeness of Him, before whom one day he should appear."

We shall, I believe, fail to obtain a full understanding of our Lord's conduct on this occasion, unless we regard this miracle somewhat in the light of a parable. Most, if not all, the miracles of our Lord have a deep symbolical meaning. When He healed the sick and the leprous, when He caused the blind to see, and the lame to walk, when He cast out devils, raised the dead, fed the multitudes, and stilled the tempest, these works which He did in His Father's name, not only bore witness that He had sent Him, but these proofs of His power to supply our natural wants and remove our outward infirmities, are so many plain-spoken assurances that He is abundantly able also, and equally willing, to supply the far deeper needs of our inner being, and to satisfy all the longings of our immortal souls. This miracle however is in one respect unlike nearly all others. Besides accomplishing the ends already pointed out the other miracles were acts of blessing, satisfying

some urgent need of the present moment. The leprous man was cleansed, the lame were healed, the blind saw, the multitudes were fed, the disciples were saved from a watery grave. Even the piece of silver in the fish's mouth relieved a present want; but this miracle, as also the withering of the barren fig-tree, served no end of a like nature. We necessarily regard these as specially intended to convey instruction.

Our Lord's words to Peter, "Fear not, from henceforth thou shalt catch men;" or those given by Matthew, as addressed to the other disciples also—"Follow me and I will make you fishers of men," plainly indicate the nature of the teaching He wished by this miracle to give. It was His work to draw all men away from their idle wanderings, from their sinful pleasures, from their confidence in worldly riches, from their false religions, that He might gather them unto Himself; that all men, acknowledging Him as Lord, might under His loving sway enjoy the rich blessings and the glorious liberty of the children of God. But in order to accomplish this work, it was part of His plan largely to employ human agency. As He gathered one after another to Himself, He engaged these to gather others. At this early interview with His first disciples, He intimated that this would be the character of their

work for Him. They were to "fish men," they were to win souls to Him. The account given by Matthew and Mark adds nothing to this, but the miracle we are speaking of taught something further. They had toiled by themselves all night, and had taken nothing : in His presence, and acting under His direction, they had accomplished much. "Without me ye can do nothing ;" with my help "nothing shall be impossible to you." These appear as the first lessons Jesus gave to His apostles in the Christian Ministry. Let us examine them a little more closely.

CHAPTER II.

CHRIST'S FISHERMEN.

"*I will make you fishers of men.*" This is our Lord's work, and His alone. We cannot make one another such by our colleges, or our training institutions, or by the imposition of hands. Neither can we make ourselves such by close studying, whether of books or men, or by much meditation, or by patient mental culture. These things are very useful in their right places, but *alone* they are valueless for Christ's service. He must fit His servants for their work as well as appoint them to it, or their labour will be in vain. All denominations of Christians agree more or less in these statements. Every minister of the Church of England has, prior to his ordination, to declare "his trust that he is inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost to take upon him this office and ministration," whilst the frequent reference to the necessity of the Spirit's intervention, and the oft repeated prayers for His assistance on the part of other ministers, shew that these truths are assented to by them all. Yet in order to fill the position of

minister in our different churches and chapels, how among some, the laying on of the Bishop's hands, and among nearly all, a course of college instruction, and no small amount of intellectual training, are practically considered quite as necessary as their appointment and qualification by the Head of the Church. I am not, however, intending here to enter upon the question as to what are the necessary qualifications for minister in church or chapel, nor upon the prior question as to the propriety of any one person being placed just in the position these are. The term "fishers of men" embraces a far larger circle of labourers, whilst it is at the same time far from including all the services which at present appertain to the Clergyman or the Pastor.

Our Saviour fulfilled His promise ; He made Peter and his companions fishers of men ; and if we desire to know how we are to be fitted for such service now, it may help us to mark the course which He adopted with them. The simple condition on their part was, "Follow me ;" and this was, with but little exception, literally fulfilled by them. Jesus could say of them, "Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations." Peter also spoke of "these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning at the baptism of John, unto that same

day that He was taken up from us." Thus for about three years they listened to His teaching, were witnesses of His mighty works, enjoyed much private communion with Him, and were daily under the influence of His holy example. And during this period He not only instructed them in the laws of His kingdom, in the simple though glorious truths of the Gospel, and in some of its deep mysteries, but He was engaged all the while in drawing them closer and closer to Himself, and in getting a firmer hold upon their hearts.

Here was something for which the very best college education is indeed a poor substitute. But this was not all. Notwithstanding these years of training, during which they had not been altogether shut out from some practical acquaintance with the work to which they were called, there yet remained much for them to be taught. Jesus told them on the evening of His betrayal, "I have many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now:" nor could this have been otherwise. That to which a very large portion of His teaching had more or less reference, and without which much of it must have been unintelligible, that which placed His whole life and all that He had taught them in a new and glorious light, had not yet taken place. That light burst upon their souls when, after His resurrection,

He again became their teacher ; when, beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the Scriptures, the things concerning Himself.

Still the work of qualification was not complete. Jesus had promised that the Comforter, the Spirit of Truth, should come unto them, that He should guide them into all truth, and that He should bring all things to their remembrance whatsoever He had said unto them. He bade them wait at Jerusalem till they should receive power from on high. They waited. The Holy Ghost descended upon them ; they went forth speaking with the power which He gave ; and the promise obscurely conveyed in the miracle was fulfilled ; "now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes."

The preparation required by the apostles for a work, second in importance to none which has devolved upon man to perform, was very different in *degree* to that which is now required for drawing souls to Christ ; different in degree only, however, not in kind. They were taught by Christ Himself. They were sent out by Him. They received power from the Holy Spirit. And it must still be so with all those who effectively preach Christ crucified.

In the first place such must be taught by Christ. There are many who sometimes feel a necessity laid

upon them to preach the Gospel who have often been ready to cry out, when a sense of ignorance and incapacity has greatly oppressed them, "Oh, if I might but have a training like the apostles! If I might but spend three years in such a school; daily listening to such a Teacher; imbibing His earnest spirit; learning from His example how to teach, as well as what to teach; with the opportunity of coming direct to Him for the solution of my doubts and the relieving of my perplexities." And such longings as these will not be in vain if they lead any to approach as near as they can to such an ideal. Jesus Christ is not dead, neither has He forsaken His people. We can no longer literally sit at His feet and listen to Him; see Him with our eyes, and hear Him answer our questions; but we may still in spirit hold intercourse with Him, and know Him to commune with us. The patient waiting upon Him which we find necessary, the close watching that we may catch his eye and understand what He is teaching us, the care required to keep our own eye single, the impenetrable mists which in our darker hours seem to hang around us and hide Him from our sight,—these things make us conclude that it is much more difficult for us to get at His mind now, and learn of Him, than it was for the apostles.

It may be so, though it is not for us to calculate

the extent to which their faith and patience were tried. The rich blessings of the Gospel are freely given to us through our Lord Jesus Christ; they are to be had without money and without price; yet each gem of Divine truth may require to be sought with care, and some may require a much more diligent search than others: nor does God grant these gems to those whose object in searching for them is to adorn themselves, or to gratify a vain curiosity; they are to be used to His glory. It is thus with us; but it was the same also with the apostles.

We have certainly no right to expect Christ to teach us, if we neglect those means for becoming acquainted with His mind and with His doctrine which He has given us in the Holy Scriptures. Still the mere ordinary study of these records of His will will of itself prove of little avail. What we know of a person's mind by his writings is as nothing compared with that which we obtain by frequent personal intercourse with Him. And this is true in an especial manner as regards our knowledge of God. By the Scriptures alone, necessary as they are, we may learn something about God, as a blind man may be taught something about colours, or a deaf man something about sound. But quite as much as they need to have their eyes opened, or their ears unstopped, be-

fore they can have any clear conception of what they have been taught, must we have personal intercourse with God before we can know Him or understand the Scriptures. Nor is this an attainment to be reached only by a few. God in Jesus Christ would make Himself known to all. He stands at the door and knocks; and those are not unmeaning mystical words which assert, "If any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in and sup with him, and he with me." They imply an actual communion between the soul and Jesus Christ, which gives to those who enjoy it a conviction of the reality of Divine things far beyond that which can be brought about by any train of argument. And those who are seeking to win souls to Christ obtain thereby a power to adopt in measure the words of the apostle John, "We declare unto you that which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled of the word of life."

Like the apostles, then, every Christian worker may be taught by Christ Himself. Not on a few special occasions only, but day by day; and his ministrations will be the richest, and convey the lessons of deepest instruction, who has thus obtained most of his Master's mind.

CHAPTER III.

AUTHORITY AND POWER.

BESIDES being taught by Christ, the apostles were sent out by Him, specially appointed to their work, and commissioned by Him to proclaim the glad tidings far and wide. And those who would win souls to Christ now require a measure of the same authority to do so. "How can they preach except they be sent?"

There is a sense in which it may be said that every one who has been himself taught by Christ has received a commission to preach Him to others. His parting command, "Preach the gospel to every creature," was not intended for the apostles only; it is in force as long as the promise that accompanies it. "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," demands that those who enjoy the blessings of the Gospel should seek to make them known to others. Cain's excuse, "Am I my brother's keeper?" will be vain in our mouths if we neglect to do this; for "to him

that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin." We can none of us say that we have no duty to perform in the way of preaching Christ to others, because we have not been sensible of any special appointment thereto. And yet the magnitude of such a work, the difficulties that attend it, and our own incapacity to perform it, convince us that we need something more than a sense of our having received this general commission before we *publicly* undertake it. The fisherman requires not only to have a net put into his hand ; he must know when, and where, and how to cast it.

If a prince sends an army into his enemy's country each soldier feels himself included in the commission ; *he is sent*. But if all act without further direction, each in his own way, the army will accomplish little ; each must strictly follow the special directions which his leader gives him.

Christ is our Leader ; we are all sent by Him. "As the Father hath sent me, even so send I you ;" and it is essential first that we should realize this ; that each one of us should feel that he is sent, and that he has a post assigned him in the great work of evangelizing the world. Then as to the special directions to each. We should like to have these audibly given, just as we should like to hear Christ's voice whilst He teaches us, and have Him answer our inquiries with no trouble

to ourselves. But we shall mostly look in vain for direction that shall need no pains or preparation of heart on our part in order to understand it.

Within certain limits our duty in these things is set forth by clear Scripture injunctions, or by the position we hold with regard to others. What parent fears to preach Christ to his children, lest he should be acting without due authority? He feels the need of wisdom as to how he shall do it most effectively; but as to the fact that this is his duty he has no doubt at all. The same may be said in almost equal measure with regard to those under our care in other relations of life. But as the circle widens these plain directions fail. We want something beyond these, some more special guidance, some intimation of the path of duty coming more immediately from our Leader and Captain. Can we obtain this now as the apostles did in days past?

The question is a very important one, and much might be said in reply; my answer, however, must be brief. When Christ ascended He sent to us the Holy Spirit, that He might abide with us for ever, and take His place amongst us. All Christians, more or less, admit this fact, though they differ much as to the manner and character of His work; and we need not be surprised at this when we consider the diversity of His operations. But, accept-

ing Him as our Guide, if we place no limit on the mode in which He shall guide us, in which He, acting as the means of communication between Christ, the Head of the Church, and each of His living members, shall make known His will, appoint each his place of service, and direct him in the accomplishment of it, we come to this: he who has most heartily given himself to the Lord, and is most in earnest to know his right place, and to do his duty therein, will be most likely to see clearly where that path of duty lies. The promise will be fulfilled to him, "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way that thou shalt go; I will guide thee with mine eye." So that whether he is called to preach Christ openly in his daily intercourse with others, or in the Sunday school, or in visiting the sick, or in privately pleading with those in health; or whether it is his place to address assembled multitudes in the house of prayer, or to labour among the heathen; however lowly or however exalted the service may appear, he will know that he has authority from Christ to perform it. But mind—the distinctness with which the path of duty will open before him, and the peace with which he will tread that path will mainly depend on the simplicity of his aim, and on his willingness to take any place, low or high, which may be assigned to him.

There is one other feature of our Lord's dealings

with His servants which it is well to take notice of. Those who are called to fill the most responsible positions have often to pass through much preparatory service. This is almost invariably the case in worldly occupations, and certainly it is so in spiritual things. It is a principle often laid down in the New Testament—that he that is faithful in a little shall be made ruler over more; and it is by the diligent occupation of the few talents committed at first that more are added, and the sphere of service becomes gradually enlarged. Thus the humble believer, seeking daily guidance, and careful to make the day's work keep pace with the day, is led on, step by step, till paths, which at one time he would have thought it impossible he could ever enter, are trodden by him at length with a firm and steady step.

We conclude, then, that Christ not only teaches His people still as He taught His apostles, but that He also specially appoints them to their work as He did these. The further question remains; may we also know, as they did, what it is to receive *power* from on high through the baptism of the Holy Ghost? That this power is needed still, we admit; we know, too, that "the promise is to us and to our children, and to all that are afar off;" and however little the Church at large has availed itself of the blessings which an affirmative answer to this question

implies as within its reach, such an answer would be so generally given that there seems little occasion for entering at any length upon it here ; but there are one or two branches of the subject on which I should like to say a few words.

Our Lord told His disciples, when they were brought before kings and governors for His sake, to take no thought beforehand what they should speak, neither to premeditate ; “For,” said He, “it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you.” These words have been by many applied to the preaching of the Gospel, so that some have been taught that they forbid a minister in such service to premeditate, or in any way prepare or arrange beforehand what he shall say. Instead of this, he is confidently to expect the Holy Spirit to supply him with all that is needful without any previous thought on his part.

It is easy to reply, that our Lord’s words have no reference at all to the preaching of the Gospel ; but objectors can fairly say, by way of rejoinder, if in a situation like that supposed, we may rely upon the Holy Spirit to supply us with words proper to be spoken, may we not quite as much expect it in a situation of still greater responsibility ? I have no hesitation in saying, that I believe many so trusting

have not been disappointed, but, when the occasion required, have been enabled to preach "in demonstration of the Spirit and of power," in a manner that has both surprised and humbled themselves. I have not a word to say against facts which imply that the Holy Spirit does at times thus qualify for service; I rejoice in believing it; but I desire that we may be preserved from so limiting His operations as to suppose that this is the *only* way in which He works.

"There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit; there are differences of administration, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all." Teachers are needed in the Church as well as prophets, and both are but earthen vessels, liable to much human infirmity. It would be a great mistake to suppose that the Spirit does not often graciously assist in the composition and delivery of the carefully prepared or written address, as well as in the unpremeditated one; and it would be another great mistake to suppose that human infirmity is less likely to show itself in the extempore address than in one of a different character.

There is another snare to which this limited idea of the Spirit's work exposes those who maintain it. Where circumstances or real duties have altogether prevented that preparation of mind or heart, which

otherwise he would gladly have sought for, a minister may take much comfort in our Lord's words, just quoted, and expect assistance according to his need ; but I am persuaded they were never intended as an encouragement to a presumptuous or indolent spirit. In the Acts of the Apostles we certainly meet with little which implies careful premeditation on the part of those labouring in their Lord's service, but we meet with much that implies careful preparation of heart. What an impression Paul's epistles give of the frequency and earnestness of his prayers, and how often he requests others to pray for him ; " And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the Gospel." And who can doubt but that often whilst wrestling in prayer for himself and others, as in Peter's case when upon the housetop, it was not only that his petitions ascended to the Lord, but that the Lord also communicated with him, and shewed him what he was to do, and, in measure, what he was to say. Very different to the conduct of the apostles is that of those, who, presuming on the power of the Spirit to give the needful help when the occasion requires, are comfortably taking their ease, pursuing their own thoughts or engaged in their ordinary occupations, as if man had no share in the ministry of the Gospel, except to be the mouth-

piece of the Holy Ghost under His extraordinary impulses.

Our Lord's testimony to the work of the Holy Spirit is this, "He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance whatsoever I have said unto you." Here are two things; first, the teaching; then, the bringing to remembrance what has been taught; for if we take these words as having application to ourselves, as well as to the apostles, we are quite warranted in putting this construction upon them. The teaching, in the first place, to be laid up in his treasure-house by the good householder, thence to be brought forth, that which is new and that which is old, as the same Spirit brings it fresh to his remembrance for the purpose of teaching others.

It is very plain that if we have neglected the first; if we have been unwilling to be taught, or too indolent to take the trouble to learn; if we have been setting about it in our own way instead of coming, docile as a little child, unto the Lord, patiently waiting upon Him, prayerfully studying His word, and looking for His enlightening grace, the treasure-house will have little in it that is of solid worth, and, as a necessary consequence, the Holy Spirit will have little to bring to our remembrance for the use of others.

We may see this strikingly illustrated in the teach-

ing of the Church during times of comparative darkness, when the truth has been little known and greatly misunderstood. If the Spirit of God gave to His servants, every time they taught, the thoughts and words as well as power, how is it that we find such a difference between the ministrations of His people in different ages. That of Divine truth, which such men as Xavier, Bernard of Clairvaux, or Boniface, had through Divine teaching appropriated as their own, they were able with much power to proclaim to others, though their teaching was greatly mixed with that which was not true. But other truths, which they might have learned had man's teaching been laid aside and God's more looked to, had the Bible been more read and read with less prejudice, and had their hearts been able to receive them, not being among the number of their treasures, could not be brought to their remembrance by the Holy Spirit when He used them as His servants.

Some of the remarks last made may seem to be specially applicable, though not exclusively so, to the religious Society with which I rejoice in being connected. But some of these may object that in the ages when these illustrious men lived, there was so little faith in the guidance of the Holy Spirit, so little acknowledgment of His power, so little seeking for it, that they cannot rightly be regarded as illus-

trating what I have endeavoured to set forth. I will not wait to reply to this, but I can point to illustrations which are yet more convincing, to which these objections cannot be made, in the history of our own Society. If we go back upwards of a hundred years it would be easy to point to some whom we have been accustomed to regard as gifted men, often to all appearance remarkably guided in their ministry and really powerful in their preaching, who were, nevertheless, as far as we can judge by their biographies and writings, almost silent on some of the leading truths of Christianity. These truths seem hardly to have found a place in their treasures, their relative importance had not been learnt, and consequently in their teaching also they remained greatly in the background; with how much loss to their own Society or to the Church at large none can tell.

"I believe in the Holy Ghost," may be said by multitudes who differ very widely as to what they believe respecting Him; and if this is the case with regard to His influence on man in leading to conversion of heart and holiness of life, it is quite as true, if not more so, with regard to His influence in the ministry of the word. Ought we not all however to agree in this: that he most practically believes in the Holy Ghost who daily craves to be taught by Him, guided by Him, and altogether

brought under His influence ; and who, in the trust that his prayers are heard, carefully watches for the slightest intimation of His will, and yet in nowise neglects the cultivation and exercise of those intellectual powers which God has entrusted to him. These, with all else that he possesses, he has consecrated to the service of his Lord, and he regards them as talents which will increase in the occupation of them. Such an one, when his mental endowments are small, will aptly illustrate the words of the Psalmist, "A little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked."

CHAPTER IV.

A FULL NET.

AFTER what has been said, can we not all agree in these two conclusions? In the first place that every one who loves his Saviour has a place to fill and a work to perform for Him. It may be a very lowly place, and the work may have little honour before men, and appear very insignificant; still there is a place and a work for each. And, secondly, that the Church in the present day is in nowise inferior to the Church in the apostles' days or at any subsequent period, so far as regards the appliances at its disposal for carrying on the work entrusted to it. Christ, to whom all power is given in heaven and in earth, is still its living Head; and the help of the Holy Spirit is as available for us as for any that have gone before us. Bearing these two conclusions in mind, let us consider the lesson which the miracle from which we started seems mainly intended to teach. Without Christ we can do nothing; with His presence and blessing, as we follow His directions, nothing shall be impossible unto us.

Our dependence upon Christ has been already much dwelt upon, but the certainty that our labour when so dependent will not be in vain, may well claim a little further attention. The apostle Paul often urges it when he calls his fellow-disciples to work. "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, for as much as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." "Let us not be weary in well-doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not."

We are sometimes told to devote ourselves to good works, to labour unweariedly for our Lord, but *not* to be looking for results. I doubt the wisdom of such counsel; at least, I feel persuaded that it may be acted on with serious injury. I believe we *ought* sometimes to look for results, not impatiently, certainly; nor for self-gratification or self-glorification, but because they are promised. And if after long working and waiting good results do not follow, it is time to consider whether something has not been wrong. Results followed the work of the apostles most apparently and abundantly. Results still follow Christian work of the right kind, but not by any means to the same extent, and often there appear to be very few indeed. Every one has some way or other of accounting for this, and some account for

it in a way that leaves them feeling very easy about it. I do not like that we should feel thus easy, but that when we look at the godlessness and moral corruption which exist among the rich and educated, as well as among the poor and ignorant, in so-called Christian countries, to say nothing of the hundreds of millions of heathen, and observe how extremely paltry is our united power in stemming all this, we should feel it a source of deep humiliation, and should carefully inquire how much of the blame lies at our own door.

It would be very easy to enumerate a great many things which are not as they should be, all of which tend to weaken the good influence of Christ's Church in the present day ; but to do so would be to repeat an oft-told tale, and serve little purpose. One of these only will I dwell upon. Are we not in the habit of expecting too much from the public ministers of religion as compared with what we expect from the ordinary members of our churches ? To put it in other words : are we not in the habit of expecting too much from the generals, and officers, and colonels in the Lord's army, and too little from the common soldiers ?

There have been many periods in the history of the Church when true religion was at a very low ebb, in which, as in its first days, men of large

spiritual gifts have been instrumental in bringing great numbers to the knowledge of their Saviour. A great impulse has thereby been given to the Redeemer's work; but in two or three generations this impulse has subsided, and for a long time little or no further progress has been made. Is this because the gifted men have passed from the scene, and the Holy Spirit has prepared no one to supply their places? Or is it not rather because those who were by these means brought to their Saviour did not properly realize that they also had a work to do for Him, and that, though less or differently gifted, they were equally bound to use to their utmost their humbler gifts in their Master's work? A few earnest men, largely gifted, accomplished much; but a much larger number, though less gifted, if equally in earnest, would have accomplished much more.

In each succeeding generation, moreover, the work required to be done is of somewhat a different character. At first, it was that of the herald proclaiming the glad tidings of Jesus Christ to those who were entirely ignorant of it. After a while its sound is familiar far and wide; the children hear of it in their childhood, and, though imperfectly understood, there are few who are not more or less acquainted with it. Then the power that has perhaps the greatest influence is that of the earnest

Christian who, whether a man of many talents or few, plainly shews by his outward life, by his daily conversation, and, when occasion calls for it, by his fearless yet loving words, that his citizenship is in heaven, and that He believes in Him whose name he bears. Now this is a power which *every* disciple of Christ, the common soldier quite as much as the officers, ought to exert ; and it is in great measure, I believe, because we lack this power so much, that so little blessing, comparatively, attends the ordinary ministrations of our preachers and teachers, and that so little progress is made in the advancement of Christ's kingdom. Of what avail is it that they should be greatly in earnest, or mighty in the Scriptures, or be able to rivet the attention of their hearers, or fascinate them by their eloquence, if these by their conduct give the lie to their minister's teaching. That this is done directly and consciously is, I trust, the exception rather than the rule, but indirectly and thoughtlessly, can it be said so ?

What lesson, for instance, and I notice this as one example out of many that might be given, is more often taught from the pulpit and from the minister's gallery, than that there are no joys like the joys of God's salvation ; that the peace the Saviour gives is what the world can neither give nor take away ; that the sufferings of this present world are not worthy

to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed. These and similar truths are continually being taught, and are assented to, yes, and believed by all, I will not say who make profession of religion, but who really love their Lord. Yet what numbers even of these latter, if we were to follow them from the house, where, it may be, they have been singing with much fervour,—

My God, the spring of all my joys,
The life of my delights,
The glory of my brightest days,
And comfort of my nights:

and, in the coming week, were to mark the interest they take in their business speculations, their home luxuries and comforts, their engrossing worldly pursuits of one kind or other, and compare this with the indifference they betray to anything connected with the advancement of Christ's kingdom, especially if it involves any sacrifice on their part; what numbers, I say, even of those who love their Saviour, would, when thus tested, convey the impression that the joys they most relished had little to do with heaven.

It would be very unjust to pass judgment upon these, to affirm that this was really the case; we cannot see the secret conflict of spirit through which

some of these pass ; all I mean to say is, that this would be the impression conveyed to an ordinary looker-on, and that to his mind, these, by their daily walk, give the lie to what has been publicly taught. I believe we little know the extent to which this impression becomes gradually yet firmly fixed upon the minds of young people, when they begin to think for themselves ; nor how many of those painful instances we too often meet with of pious parents having to mourn over ungodly sons and daughters may be traced indirectly to this cause.

There is no royal road by which we shall obtain perfection in the Christian Church ; no manual of religion made easy that can meet the wants of this age or any. Our Lord was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, and that for our sakes. His early followers bore cheerfully the spoiling of their goods, knowing that in heaven they had a better and an enduring substance ; the early Reformers loved not their lives unto the death ; and he that would now maintain in his business, in his counting-house, among his fellow-workmen, and in his daily intercourse with the world, whatever his position in life, a consistent humble walk that shall glorify his Saviour and adorn his profession, must prepare for trials and difficulties. Are we *sure* that none of us are called upon, even in this age of liberty, to risk

our substance at least, if not our lives, quite as much as our forefathers were ?

Our Protestant Reformers died at the stake rather than falsely say they believed the sacramental wafer was the body of Christ ; and yet how many of their admirers in the present day, will excuse the deceitful tricks of trade, and the falsehoods told in connection with it, by no better arguments than that the competition of others would ruin their business, if they did not do as others did. We speak in high tones of the spirit and firmness of the martyrs, but we sadly lack a like spirit and a like firmness in steadily setting ourselves against all that is false, and dishonest, and mean, and hypocritical, whether in trade, or in the maxims and customs of daily life, or in the subscriptions we make to Church formularies, or in the professions of zeal and devotion which fall from our lips in the church, the chapel, or the public meeting.

There is much demand in the present day for a more intellectual and more powerful ministry, for one able to grapple wisely with the deep questions which now agitate men's minds ; and also for an increase of Bible readers, town missionaries and female agents amongst the ignorant and degraded ; and all this in its place is very well ; but, if I am not much mistaken, the direction in which we must

mainly look for a large gathering of souls to Christ, is in a nobler, higher walk, and one of more patient self-denial, on the part of all those who love Him. If we are to regard, as I believe we may, the miracle which has this evening engaged our attention as containing a promise to the Church, applicable in all ages, the fulfilment of that promise is plainly dependent upon obedience to Christ's directions; and we must not regard the responsibility of success as devolving wholly, or indeed mainly, upon the public ministers of religion; but all must bear it alike.

When each one who comes to Christ, and finds in Him forgiveness and rest, has learned the further lesson of "Take my yoke upon you and learn of Me," not only will he find the yoke easy and the burden light, but in a greater or less degree, he will find the promise fulfilled in his own case, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men."

When the Church at large shall arise and shake herself from the dust, when she shall cast aside the tawdry ornaments wherewith she has so often decked herself to please the world and curry favour with it; and shall put on her own beautiful garments which her Bridegroom has given her; meekness, gentleness, forbearance, love, joy and peace; Christian boldness and confidence; truth in act, word, and heart; then shall we see the windows of heaven

opened, and a blessing poured out that there shall not be room to receive it; then shall we see the Gospel net draw to land such a multitude, that again and again shall those who cast it exclaim, in deep humility, "It is the Lord."

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